Dumas Father and Son

Francis Gribble

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DUMAS: FATHER AND SON

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS (père)
(1840)

DUMAS
FATHER AND SON

By

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

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DUMAS: FATHER AND SON

CHAPTER I

ONE must begin with the ancestor and the ancestress: the Marquis Davy de la Pailleterie, one of the richest of the eight thousand planters who, in the third decade of the eighteenth century, were trying to make their fortunes in San Domingo; and Marie Dumas, a negress, one of the 500,000 slaves who were there "toiling in the sun" to enrich the planters.

Next to nothing is known about either of them. The little that their illustrious grandson tells us about them in his Memoirs cannot be trusted. His statement that the Marquis (if he really was a marquis, which is doubtful) married the coloured woman who had found favour in his eyes, is quite incredible. The proof of the marriage which he offers proves merely that the Marquis's son, who was the novelist's father, told the Mayor of Villers-Cotterets, at the time of his own marriage, that his mother was his father's wife, and that his step-mother, the Marquis's second wife, who was one of the witnesses of that marriage, knew nothing—or, at any rate, said nothing—to the contrary.

Evidence of that sort is valueless. It carries no weight whatever in the face of the fact that no marquis has ever been known to marry a negress, and that the marquis's son never, after his father's death, assumed his father's title, and did not inherit either lands or money from him. The conclusion cannot be avoided that he was illegiti-

mate, and that when his own son, the novelist, styled himself a marquis, as he occasionally did, before he was quite sure that he had made the name of Dumas more famous than that of Davy de la Pailleterie, he was laying claim to a title to which he had no more right than the next man.

It was in or about 1760 that the Marquis went to San Domingo. His son, Thomas-Alexandre, was born on 25 March, 1762. Marie Dumas died in 1772. The Marquis returned to France, bringing his son with him, in or about 1780; and the Memoirs tell us that the boy, then aged eighteen, was received as an equal by the young men of fashion of the period and lived on intimate terms with the scions of the houses of Lafayette, Lameth, Dillon and Lauzun.

That story, however, is not much more credible than the story of the marriage. The French attached a good deal more importance to the colour line in the eighteenth century than they do nowadays; and Lafayette was hardly likely, after his sojourn in the United States, to attach less importance to it than other Frenchmen. We may take it, therefore, that, though the Marquis's natural mulatto son may occasionally have met young Frenchmen of fashion, he never belonged to their social circle. If he had done so, they would not all have disappeared, as they do, from the Memoirs, as soon as the Marquis's death had been recorded; and it is significant that the one story told, in the Memoirs, of this period of the mulatto's life indicates that his colour was obnoxious to his companions, that his manners lacked distinction, and that his social position was insecure and had to be supported by violence.

The scene was a box at the Montansier theatre—the box of a fashionable lady of light reputation. The young man—his age was then twenty-two—came to visit her in her box in attire which his son describes as "extremely *négligé*." An officer in the musketeers joined the party, ignored the young man, and began an intimate conversation with the lady, who drew his attention to the fact that they were not alone.

"I'm so sorry," he said, after he had looked round. "I thought that gentleman was your negro servant."

Whereupon the offended mulatto—hot-tempered and a man of his hands—picked the officer up and slung him over the parapet on to the heads of the spectators in the stalls.

If we assume that the box was on the lowest tier, that the house was not overcrowded, and that the spectators were able to avoid the actual impact of the falling body, we need not refuse to believe that story. It is the first of many stories which Alexandre Dumas tells in illustration of his father's physical strength, which must, if all the stories are true, have surpassed even that of heavy-weight prize-fighters and professional strong men.

The measurement of his calf, we are told, was precisely that of his wife's waist. He could insert his four fingers in the barrels of four muskets and hold out the four muskets at arm's length. He could bite pieces out of steel helmets. He could hop round a room, holding a man in each arm. He could grasp an overhead beam, while on horseback, and lift the horse off the ground by the grip of his riding muscles. And so on, and so forth: one doubts whether even Sandow, in his prime, could have done as much.

Evidently he was a colossus, though his height was only five foot nine and his feet were small enough for women's slippers to fit them. His son's statement that he was a remarkably handsome colossus can be tested by an examination of his portrait. His appearance, as there depicted, is undeniably striking, though the negroid characteristics are pronounced: the hair—but there is very little of it—woolly and frizzled, the lips thick and pendent, the complexion hardly less black than the grate.

Was the Marquis proud of him?

It is hard to say. The presumption, supported by such little evidence as one can gather, is that he was proud of him in the West Indies, but that his pride abated, if it did not entirely disappear, in the Parisian atmosphere, and that he came, there, to regard him as a nuisance and an encumbrance—perhaps because of the aloofness of his own family's attitude. It is certain, at any rate, that no biographer has ever discovered any trace of any ties of affection between any members of the House of Davy de la Pailleterie and their coloured connection, and that relations between the French father and his mulatto son gradually became strained.

The climax came when, in 1786, the Marquis, at the age of seventy-four, married his housekeeper, Marie-Françoise Retou, and reduced his son's allowance. The son then quarrelled with his father and announced his intention of enlisting in the army; and the father raised no objection, stipulating only that he should enlist, not under the name of Davy de la Pailleterie, but under that of Dumas.

Probably there was more in the quarrel than we know

GENERAL DUMAS

of. That inference seems justified by the fact that the mulatto did not, so far as is known, inherit any of the Marquis's money; but nothing is discoverable, and there was no time for the quarrel to be composed, for the Marquis died less than a fortnight after the young Dumas had joined his regiment at Laon.

CHAPTER II

IT was the Revolution which gave the young mulatto his opportunity. But for the Revolution and the revolutionary wars, he would, in all probability, never have been heard of.

For four years he remained a private—or, at the most, a non-commissioned officer—in the dragoons. Nothing is known of his life during those years except that he fought several duels for the fun of the thing and the honour of the regiment, in the spirit in which German students fight for their corps. Probably the feats of strength enumerated in the last chapter belong to this period. Few people knew him, and they knew him only as a high-spirited young Hercules.

He was no politician. One does not even know for certain, though one may reasonably surmise, that his sympathies were democratic. It meant nothing to him, in his provincial garrison, that the Estates General had been convoked, that the Bastille had been stormed, that the heads of reactionaries had been carried round the town on pikes, and that the King had been fetched from Versailles to Paris. He was not clever enough to guess that such events as these would affect his own fortunes.

But they did. They completely transformed his prospects.

Soon France was at war, and was getting the worst of

it. Soldiers were wanted. The *levée en masse* was called for. Officers for the new armies had to be dug out of the ranks of the old armies. The demand for competent officers exceeded the supply. Competence, all of a sudden, counted for more than either birth or colour. Colour, indeed, did not count at all. The cry of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity having been raised, the mulatto was, in the twinkling of an eye, transfigured into a man and a brother; and promotion came to him rapidly.

His range, indeed, was limited. He had not the makings of a strategist; but he was brilliant at minor tactics, and a first-class fighting man. Single-handed, in some skirmish on the frontiers, he took thirteen Austrian prisoners and drove them into the French lines, with their thirteen muskets, tied into a bundle, slung across his saddle. The terrifying aspect of his black face had scared them into surrender. That black face became, as it were, an oriflamme in the French ranks, and it caused his enemies to speak of him, with bated breath, as the Black Devil.

His valiant feat was recorded in an Order of the Day. General Beurnonville waived ceremony, invited him to dinner, and made him a sergeant-major. Taking the intervening ranks in his stride, he obtained his commission as lieutenant-colonel on September 15, 1792; and further promotion soon followed. He became a major-general on July 20, 1793, a lieutenant-general on September 3, 1793, and, five days later, general in command of the Army of the Western Pyrenees.

A detailed record of his subsequent military services will not be wanted. Even in the highest rank he owed his renown, not to his military genius, which was negli-

gible, but to the spectacular heroism which made him a legendary figure. One need give only a brief enumeration of his successive commands as a prelude to the presentation of his exploits in the character of Black Devil.

From the Pyrenees, where he never actually took up his command, he was sent, on 30 November, 1793, to the Vendée; but he had been there less than a month when he was given the command of the Army of the Alps, whence he went back on August 17, 1794, to take command of the Army of the West, and help Hoche in the suppression of the Vendean rising. A period of leave at Villers-Cotterets followed; but in October, 1795, he was summoned to Paris, and in January, 1796, he was given the command of the Upper Rhine.

A wound, necessitating an operation, compelled him to go on leave again. In June, 1796, he was sent to serve as general of division under Kellermann in the Army of the Alps, which he had previously commanded in chief. Towards the end of October he was ordered to Italy, where he came under the command of Napoleon. In the early months of 1797 he was, first under Massena and then under Joubert, hustling the retreating Austrians in Tyrol. Later in the year he was once again in Italy. In 1798 he joined Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, and remained there until Napoleon quarrelled with him and sent him home.

That is our bald summary—our framework. It remains to work the portrait into the frame, and to show what manner of man this mulatto general—the founder of the House of Dumas—really was.

His seems to have been a simple nature; but several

kinds of simplicity would appear to have blended in it. The one thing which he could certainly do better than anybody else was to fight. Fighting was not only his trade but his delight. He took to it as a duck takes to water. He enjoyed it as a schoolboy enjoys his games. He was as much in his element in a battle as a footballer in a scrimmage. There was no question in his case of controlling nerves or subduing fear. He had no nerves to control and no fears to subdue. It simply did not occur to him that fighting was dangerous. Least of all did it occur to him that there could be any danger in a hand-to-hand *mêlée* in which a strong man could make full use of his thews and sinews. Such wounds as he received—and he received a good many—were never serious enough to arrest his impetuosity or shake his self-confidence.

It was a great day when, coming up against some fortified position, defended by a palisade, he found that his men had some difficulty in scaling the obstacle. In his impatience he picked them up, one after the other, by the seats of their breeches, just as he had picked up the insolent musketeer in the Théâtre Montansier, and slung them over it, with the result that the Austrians fled in consternation before this rapid rain of armed men, falling, as it were from the skies, into their midst.

It was a greater day when, his escort having fled panic-stricken, he stood up alone on the narrow Brixen bridge and held up the advanced guard of the Austrian army till reinforcements came, firing his last cartridge, breaking the blade of his sword, and then picking up the body of one of the men whom he had killed, by the heels, swinging it, like a mace or bludgeon, and felling other enemies with it.

And both these stories are true. We do not owe them, as has sometimes been suspected, to the imaginative genius of the author of the "Three Musketeers" They are not only related in the Memoirs, but are recorded in official reports, the latter exploit earning the Black Devil the further sobriquet of the Horatius Cocles of Tyrol. Dumas *fils* laid all the proofs on the table when a statue was erected to his grandfather's memory and a journalist sought information for a brief life of him which the subscribers to the cost of the monument wished to publish.

Such physical force and prowess, the grandson proudly added, were hereditary in the House of Dumas. He himself, he said, though he was seventy, would rather like to be set upon by the Parisian apaches, in order that he might take the opportunity of showing them that he was still a man of his hands; and he then, with equal or greater pride, told a story of one of his father's mighty feats of strength.

The novelist had arrived at Avignon and was crossing the bridge. There were porters there who wanted to carry his handbag for him. He preferred to carry it himself, and the porters made offensive remarks, not knowing who he was, but remarking his dark complexion, thick lips and woolly hair. "Ah, well," said one of them, "he's only a nigger. It's a nigger's business to carry luggage." Whereupon the novelist proceeded to such action as his father, the general, would have approved, picking up one of the porters, carrying him to the side of the bridge, lifting him over the parapet, and saying fiercely:

"Now, my man, swear to me that it was not you who murdered Marshal Brune* here."

"I? But, sir——"

"You will swear that oath, my man, or I shall drop you into the Rhone."

And the porter, pale with terror, swore the oath required of him, probably without understanding it; and Dumas, instead of dropping him into the river, pitched him into the middle of the road and went on his way, grinning jovially.

There was grim humour in that act of ferocity; and one finds a similar grim humour in some of the stories told of the mulatto general—in the story, in particular, of his treatment of a suspected spy on whom no compromising papers could be found and who protested that the errand which his arrest had interrupted was purely one of gallantry.

"Shoot that man," said the general.

"Shoot me? Why?" asked the indignant prisoner.

"For the purpose of cutting you open and finding out what you've had for dinner."

Whereupon the prisoner confessed that he had indeed swallowed a despatch, and the General prescribed castor oil, which a milder man, or a man with a more refined sense of humour, would have prescribed in the first instance, without having recourse to brutal threats, and so brought the document to light.

We must think of him, therefore, as a man who like practical jokes but understood no others; and we may discover that trait in his character even in some of the

* The only Napoleonic Marshal with whom General Dumas had been intimate. He had been murdered at Avignon during the White Terror.

stories of his military valour—in the story, for instance, of his reckless ride to meet a whole squadron of Austrian cavalry.

"Good-bye, gentlemen," he shouted, after cutting down a dozen or more of them; and he turned and fled.

They were after him, like a pack of hounds after a fox, believing that the Black Devil had at last been delivered into their hands, only to be lured into an ambuscade which he had arranged and there shot down by a point-blank volley.

Nor was General Dumas any more afraid of his own superiors than of his enemies. During the Reign of Terror he stood up to the Committee of Public Safety in spite of that Committee's habit of sending to the scaffold any general whom its members disliked or distrusted. He resented their inquisitiveness and refused to disclose his military plans to them. When he found one of their guillotines erected in the village of Saint-Maurice, he ordered it to be chopped up for firewood: a bold measure from the penalty for which, it would seem, he was saved only by Carnot's appreciation of his military successes and the opportune arrival of Thermidor.

At a later date, under the Directorate, he stood up to a civilian representative of the Government who had been sent to Italy to arrange for pillage and requisitions, and who promised him a share of the plunder. He picked him up, as he was in the habit of picking up those who offended him, and tossed him into the midst of his staff, saying:

"Gentlemen, take a careful look at this little rascal so that you'll be sure to recognize him if you see him again. If he ever does turn up again in my lines in any

part of the world, have him shot, and don't trouble to come and tell me that you have done so."

He was capable, as we shall see later, of standing up to Napoleon himself, though only to discover that Napoleon was more than a match for him. Meanwhile he stood up to Berthier, whom, one may almost say, he "reported" to Napoleon for doing him an injustice.

Berthier, in his report on the siege of Mantua, had spoken of Dumas as being posted "in observation in front of the citadel." The statement may have been technically correct; but it ignored the fact that Dumas had been continuously under fire and had had two horses killed under him during the engagement. So he collected evidence to that effect and forwarded it to Napoleon with a remarkable covering letter:

"GENERAL,

"I hear that the swine whom you commissioned to draw up a report on the battle of the 27th has represented that I was engaged only in observation during that battle.

"I hope he will never himself be called upon to undertake observations of that character, for I am quite sure that, if he were, he would . . ." but the conclusion is quite unprintable.

Naturally it made Dumas another enemy; the charge of cowardice rankling even more than the coarse language addressed to an aristocratic officer of the *ancien régime* by one whom he doubtless despised as an upstart half-breed. Its coarseness and violence may perhaps be read as illustrations of the inferiority complex, normal

with half-breeds, which aggressiveness discloses in the idle attempt to conceal it; but it does not, even when coupled with the stories of military valour, give us the complete picture of the man.

There is yet another General Dumas to be considered —Dumas the husband and the father, uniformly happy in his domestic relations—a Dumas whose domestic relations at Villers-Cotterets, where he stayed while on leave and lived after his retirement, almost suggest the virtuous simplicity of Uncle Tom in his cabin.

His wife was Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Labouret, the daughter of a Villers-Cotterets innkeeper. He made her acquaintance when stationed at Villers-Cotterets as a private. He married her, shortly after he had got his commission as lieutenant-colonel, on November 28, 1792. Though he was serving in the army under the name of Dumas, he married under the name of Davy de la Pailleterie, his step-mother being present at the ceremony. But neither he nor his wife ever afterwards used any name except Dumas.

It was a perfectly happy marriage—happy, one is tempted to say, in the sense in which those countries which have no history are called happy. Dumas had married neither above him nor beneath him, in a circle in which a difference of colour between bride and bridegroom seems to have been regarded as interesting rather than important. His son, it is true, makes a casual passing reference in the Memoirs to "his mistresses," but only, one surmises, because he took mistresses for granted as the common appanages of high military rank or any other exalted position. He gives no details; he tells no stories. Mme Dumas does not seem to have

been aware of any infidelity; and those of her husband's letters to her which have been printed breathe a spirit, not only of affectionate simplicity, but of deference—such deference as one can picture Uncle Tom, in his cabin, feeling, if not expressing, towards Aunt Chloe, if her colour had been a few shades lighter than his own. They begin: "Alexandre Dumas, General of Division, to his worthy and only friend," or, still more ceremoniously: "Alexandre Dumas, General of Division, to his worthy and virtuous spouse."

He, too, one feels, was worthy and virtuous—tender, perhaps, rather than passionate, and respectful, as one who felt that his union to a white woman, albeit only an innkeeper's daughter, had given him social preferment and placed him in a position in which open sexual irregularity would be incompatible with dignity.

Of course, however, with France at war, he was at home only at rare intervals and for brief periods; and we must now follow him to Egypt.

CHAPTER III

IT was in Egypt that General Dumas fell out with Napoleon.

He was in command of Napoleon's cavalry. He distinguished himself at the battle of the Pyramids. He suppressed an insurrection at Cairo with electric energy, rising from his bed to mount his horse, galloping about the streets with his black breast bare, cutting down the mamelukes there, as he had cut down the Austrians in Tyrol, and finally riding into a mosque in which the insurgents had taken refuge and terrifying them into submission.

"It is an angel," they exclaimed, according to his son's account, as they threw down their arms, their assumption being, apparently, that only an angel would have dared to invade the sacred edifice, and that angels, as well as devils, were black.

It was a great and characteristic exploit; but trouble was nevertheless impending.

Napoleon, it must be remembered, was not, at that date, the Emperor whose word was law. He was only General Bonaparte—a brilliant general, certainly, but no more, in the eyes of the other generals, than *primus inter pares;* and it was by no means universally admitted that the descent upon Egypt was an inspired stroke of genius.

Ulterior and unavowable motives were suspected. Awkward questions were querulously asked—the more

querulously because the climate was uncomfortable and the army seemed to have been bottled up for ever in the unpleasant country after Nelson had annihilated the French fleet in the battle of the Nile.

What, men began to want to know, was the sense and purpose of this strange expedition? Had Napoleon been shipped off to Egypt because the civil Government was afraid of his ambitions and wanted to get rid of him? Or was Napoleon trying to use a French army for the purpose of establishing himself as King of Egypt?

Such were the murmurs, and General Dumas was one of those who murmured.

A change seemed to have come over his character. We find his letters to his wife breathing a new spirit of depression and despondency. Roused from it, for the moment, by the necessity of quelling the revolt, he soon relapsed into it again, for reasons which can only be conjectured. Malaria may have had something to do with it; but his biographers, though they write as hero-worshippers, do not hesitate to attribute it to his African origin, the most valiant and violent of Africans being notoriously liable to "black thoughts" when they are uncomfortable and there is no call or excuse for violence.

At any rate, he talked mutinously in his tent. Some report of a mutinous conversation of his at a gathering at which Lannes and Murat were present reached Napoleon's ears; and he was called to account.

Exactly what happened is uncertain; nor does one know why Napoleon made his peace with Murat and Lannes, who had also talked mutinously, but did not make his peace with Dumas. Probably he attached more importance to the services of the former. In any case,

the story told in his son's Memoirs that Dumas offered his resignation and Napoleon unsuccessfully pressed him to withdraw it is in conflict with contemporary evidence.

"In a final interview with my father," Alexandre Dumas writes, "Bonaparte made a final effort to induce him to remain. He even went so far as to say that he himself would shortly be going to France and to promise to take him with him. Nothing could appease his desire to go, which had become a veritable malady with him."

But Desgenettes, who was at the head of the medical service of the expedition, tells quite another story. A note of his on the subject was printed some years ago in Le Temps, from a manuscript communicated to a contributor to that paper. It is headed "Conversation concerning Divisional-General Dumas, a man of colour"; and it reports Napoleon as speaking thus:

"When I reached Gizeh, I was informed that dissatisfaction was prevalent and that several generals had gone so far as to declare that they would prevent me from advancing any further into the country.

"I knew that Dumas had put himself forward in the matter, and that Murat and Lannes were also concerned in the plot. I sent for Dumas and said to him:

" 'I know what is going on, and what is being said. I am no more a fraud of a general than of a drum-major. If I believed that you, or any men like you, had dreamt for one moment of actually carrying out the absurd ideas which you have had in your heads, I would call my guides and have you shot in my presence. Then I would send for the grenadiers to try you, after you were dead, and cover your memories with everlasting infamy.'

"He burst into tears, and I saw that he was a good

fellow whom others had egged on. Indeed, he is a man of very limited intelligence. Besides, I had long ago forgotten all about the trouble. But since you now tell me that his health will no longer permit him to sleep for six weeks on the sand or in a bear's skin, he is no longer the man I want as commander of my cavalry. The first brigadier I lay my hands on can perfectly well take his place."

That seems to settle it. Dumas evidently wanted to go home, doubted whether he would be allowed to do so, and supported his request for leave by presenting a medical certificate. Napoleon, it is equally evident, did not like him, did not trust him, did not think much of him, and cared very little whether he went or stayed. So he went, together with Dolomieu, the geologist, after whom the Dolomites are called, who was in Egypt on a scientific mission; and the ship on which they sailed was chased by an English man-of-war into a Neapolitan port, where they were both made prisoners of war.

Both of them were badly treated; but Dolomieu derived some advantage from his international reputation as a man of science. The Institut National succeeded, in spite of the war, in interesting Sir Joseph Banks, then President of the Royal Society, in his welfare. Sir Joseph wrote about him to Sir William Hamilton, then British Ambassador at Naples; and though Napoleon protested to Talleyrand, then the French Foreign Minister, that these pleas for mercy made the French Government look foolish, something was done to make the distinguished prisoner comfortable in his confinement.

No one, however, pleaded for General Dumas. He languished in Neapolitan gaols for a year and a half,

when he was exchanged. His report on the rigours and persecutions which he endured has been published. Unquestionably they were severe and cruel; but his statement that his Neapolitan gaolers tried to poison him in prison but were baffled in the attempt because local sympathisers had supplied him with full information about poisons and their antidotes does not inspire confidence. Antidotes or no antidotes, gaolers who really wish to poison a prisoner can never have much difficulty in doing so.

Nor is it easy to believe the story that fifty ruffians, led by an Italian marquis, and armed with knives and daggers, entered his cell for the purpose of assassinating him, and that he leapt from a bed of sickness and scattered them with no other weapon than a walking-stick. Nothing is easier to arrange than the murder of a prisoner if the authorities detaining him consider that he would be better dead, however strong a man he may be; and one accepts this record of a feat worthy of Porthos or d'Artagnan merely as a proof that the General's son was not the first member of the House of Dumas whose imagination coloured and dramatised everything that it touched.

It was in April, 1801, that he was released—exchanged for the General Mack who was afterwards to capitulate at Ulm; and he was then instructed to conduct certain other prisoners, who had been released at the same time, to Paris. His health was seriously impaired. He was suffering from a terrible chronic indigestion which he attributed to the attempt to poison him and expected wine to cure. He wrote to his wife suggesting that his father-in-law, the innkeeper, should buy him some Madeira, adding—a characteristic Dumas touch that—

that if he had not the money with which to pay for it, he had better borrow some.

And so back to Villers-Cotterets, where he spent the brief remainder of his life; his indigestion turning out to be the premonitory symptom of cancer.

When his health mended, as it did temporarily, he wanted to be given a fresh command. He wrote letter after letter asking for one. He made a personal application for one to Berthier, but without result. Berthier made vague promises, and then sent him the official intimation that it had been decided to place him on the retired list, on half pay—£160 a year; and the allegation is made—his son insists—that his treatment was due to spite on the part, not only of Berthier, but also of Napoleon.

Napoleon should, perhaps, be acquitted. He was First Consul; he was busy; he left a great deal to Berthier; the General's letters may never have reached him. Berthier, on his part, could no doubt have pleaded truly that the state of his health made the General quite unfit for active employment; but when we read that the General was unable to recover the arrears of his pay which had accumulated during his detention as a prisoner of war, and was refused any share in the indemnity exacted from the Neapolitan Government for its treatment of those prisoners—that he was never decorated, and that his widow was awarded no pension—it is hard to doubt that Berthier was taking a malicious pleasure in exercising his influence to the detriment of the mulatto general who had called him a "swine," accused him of cowardice, and held him up to contempt and ridicule.

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL DUMAS died on February 26, 1806, his only son, Alexandre, born on July 24, 1802, being then about three and a half years old. His daughter Aimée, some nine years her brother's senior, married a minor civil servant named Letellier, and has no further connection with our story.

Of the General's last years there is little to be said, except that he was a sick man with a grievance and died in the belief, inherited by his son, that both he and his family were the victims of Napoleon's implacable hatred.

There may have been, of course, and there probably was, another side to that story. Murat and Lannes, as we have seen, were equally concerned with Dumas in the mutiny which Napoleon nipped in the bud in Egypt, telling them all that he would no more hesitate to shoot a mutinous general than a mutinous drum-major; and there must have been some reason why, whereas they quickly recovered his favour, Dumas permanently forfeited it. Apparently he went on sulking after they had submitted, and continued to show himself nervous and despondent after they had once again become enthusiastic fire-eaters.

The fact remains, at any rate, that he was "dropped," and spent his last years in neglect and poverty, Napoleon treating him with indifference, and Berthier, for the

reason which we know, with venomous animosity. Even his old companions-in-arms and mutiny seem to have cold-shouldered him; and it was not until both his son and his grandson had achieved renown in literature that France remembered his military services and gave him a statue.

He was a unique man: the type of the soldier who rises from the ranks because fighting is an instinct with him, but who lacks both the character and the graces expected from those who exercise high commands, and is, therefore, at a social disadvantage. The disadvantage was, no doubt, the greater because of his dark face and his negro blood: a social drawback which his grandson seems to have had in mind when the sculptor's first design for the proposed statue was shown to him. He insisted upon a bare-headed statue, recalling the Black Devil who had held the bridge at Brixen, and been hailed as its Horatius Cocles. He refused to have him shown in the plumed hat of a general.

"For that," he said, "would make my grandfather look like a monkey on an organ."

That is one of our proofs that the social prejudice carried weight. We may certainly find another in the fact that neither the General nor his wife is ever found mixing, on equal terms, with the other generals and their wives, or even meeting them except when they made special journeys to Paris for the purpose of asking favours, and that even Marshal Brune, the friendliest of them, made excuses when asked to act as Alexandre Dumas' godfather, saying that he was an unlucky godfather whose godchildren always died young. We may probably find a third in the fact that, when Mme Dumas pleaded for

help, in consideration of her husband's services, with all the importunity of the importunate widow, the most that the authorities could be persuaded to do for her was to set her up in a small shop to sell tobacco—the sale of tobacco being then, as it still is, a State monopoly in France.

An English analogy is, perhaps, needed to show the extent and significance of the slight. General Dumas' position in the French army had been at least equal to that of the English general who led the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, or of General Baden-Powell, when he held Mafeking. If we could picture a British government recognizing such services as those by establishing the widow of the general who had rendered them as a small shopkeeper in some such small and unimportant place as, say, Whitstable, or Aldeburgh, we should have an approximate idea alike of the social circumstances and the sense of injury which affected Alexandre Dumas in his early impressionable years.

Unfortunately he is, himself, our only witness to the events of those years; and the biographer who is contented, as most of the biographers have been, to accept the Memoirs as a faithful record has an easy task.

But one cannot trust them. Such truths as they contain are obviously embellished and embroidered; and the earnest seeker after biographical truth will read them only as fiction founded on fact.

Dumas, when he wrote them, was a personage. His personality was his literary stock-in-trade. Michelet had saluted him as "one of the forces of nature"; and he enjoyed living up to this definition of his place in the scheme of things. But he had a sense of humour, and an

eye for a good story. He could not, like Victor Hugo, mistake himself for God; nor can one picture him acting on the advice given to Lamartine by his mother—"never to laugh at myself, but always to remember that I was the handiwork of God." He laughed at himself while insisting on his importance. The figure which he saw when he looked in the mirror was that of a serio-comic demigod; and as he was writing, not for the instruction of posterity, but for the entertainment of contemporary readers, he wrote, as any reader can see with half an eye, on the assumption that it is every man's duty to leave a story better than he found it.

Some of the stories are, at one and the same time, disgustingly vulgar—not to say, dirty—and obviously fabricated: the stories, for instance, of the practical joke played on him, when he first went to school, and of the coarse remark made by a cousin of his when his wife gave birth to a child—stories which could be told in a public print, at that date, only by a man to whom a reputation for buffoonery was more important than a reputation for refinement. Others of the stories are as obviously extravagant exaggerations: the stories, for instance, of those friends of his childhood whose appetites were so large that one of them ate twenty-four fowls, and the other one hundred and four eggs, at a single meal.

An autobiography containing such stories as those cannot be taken seriously as a chronicle. It is merely a manifesto: a proof—or, rather, an assertion—that the child was father of the man; and one is not in the least impressed—at all events in the sense intended—by the anecdotes which represent Dumas brought into contact,

in his childhood, with the great events and great people of the period. The solid fact is that neither he nor any member of his family was in intimate contact with either the great people or the great events. It was, at the most, a case of *Vidi tantum:* a case like that of the sailor who summed up his experiences of active service in the song:

> At the Battle of the Nile,
> I was there all the while;
> I was there all the while
> At the Battle of the Nile.

It may be true that Dumas saw Napoleon when he passed through Villers-Cotterets on his way to Waterloo and again on his way back. It does not matter whether he did or not. It may be true, too, that his father once took him to Paris and showed him to Murat and Lannes and Pauline Bonaparte, who patted him on the head, and took notice of him, but it is also true that the excursion led to nothing, and that none of General Dumas's great friends ever did anything for General Dumas's son. One may read the stories, if one likes, as symbolical intimations of future celebrity; but they have no other interest or importance. General Dumas having been dropped, Alexandre Dumas was not picked up. The normal associates of his childhood were quite commonplace country people. His mother could not even procure him a nomination to a place in a school for the sons of officers, and he had to be content with such education as the village could provide.

One of the stories which he tells we may, perhaps, believe: the story that his mother gave birth to him in a

state of terror lest her baby should be black. Evidently she feared a "throw back"; for her son's attribution of her apprehension to the fact that she saw a black puppet in a Punch and Judy performance on the eve of her *accouchement* can hardly be accepted as the whole truth. But her alarm was groundless. The young quadroon to whom she gave birth began life as a blond baby with blue eyes and soft curly hair. It was not until later, and by degrees, that his complexion darkened and his hair became coarse, crisp and curly.

Nor need we doubt the truth of the story, though he has obviously dramatised it, that he fought successfully against the proposal to send him to a seminary and make a priest of him. The imagination boggles at the idea of Alexandre Dumas as a priest. His own imagination boggled at it in retrospect. He knew, and we know, that he would not even have been a serio-comic priest. He would have been a purely comic one; and there is little, if any, demand for comic priests in any religious society. Whether he really, as he says, ran away and hid for three days in the forest in order to avoid being sent to the seminary is another question; but the answer to it does not matter.

All his recollections of this period of his life seem to a careful student of the Memoirs to have been dramatised in such a way as to reflect and anticipate his adult personality: the personality of a versatile and many-sided man to whom life was alternately—or, perhaps, simultaneously—a great adventure and a splendid practical joke; a man of genius who thoroughly enjoyed unbending, who could utter noble and poetical sentiments with genuine but transient enthusiasm, and then, preci-

pitately, and with equal enthusiasm, turn about, and wheel about, and jump Jim Crow. One feels that particularly in the story which symbolises his early tentative aspirations after success in the paths of gallantry: the story which relates how he jumped ostentatiously across a wide ditch in order to show two elegant Parisian young ladies what a fine fellow he was, and how the athletic effort split his breeches, with the result that he had to hurry home and ask his mother to mend them, without waiting to wish the ladies a formal good-bye.

Dramatised, too, we may be sure, if not actually invented, is the story of his solemn renunciation, at the age of ten or thereabouts, of the name of Davy de la Pailleterie in favour of the name of Dumas, in spite of his mother's assurance that, if he took his grandfather's instead of his father's name, his grandfather's family might be trusted to find him a good opening in life. There is, as a matter of fact, no evidence whatsoever that his grandfather's family ever took the faintest interest in him; and the story is too exactly the story which one would have expected him to tell—and perhaps to believe—after he had made the name of Dumas more famous than that of Davy de la Pailleterie for any one else to believe it.

Dramatised, yet again, one feels equally sure, is the story of his first communion and the emotions arising therefrom.

No one would have believed him if he had spoken of his first communion too reverently or seriously. He would have offended excellent people whom he did not wish to offend if he had not treated it seriously enough. The picture which public opinion required from him

was one of cheerfulness unexpectedly breaking in on a solemn ceremony; and he drew it, telling the world that he prepared himself for confession and absolution by reading the letters of Héloïse and Abélard instead of the "Imitatio Christi" and insisted, when caught and reproached, that Abélard's exhortations were very moral and Héloïse's lamentations very pious, and adding that, on the day of the celebration, a very pretty girl knelt beside him at the altar rail—and that he valued his religious privileges the more highly for that reason.

It is well invented; but it presents the child as father to the man too crudely to be accepted as a faithful record. Nor need one see any truth other than artistic and symbolical in the account which he gives of the short-lived religious exaltation which the ceremony stirred in his bosom. One has no difficulty, indeed, in believing his statement that it was short-lived, and that his first communion was also his last; but one questions the accuracy of his comparison of his heart to a religious volcano from which religious lava overflowed.

And what of his first love—the story of which follows so hard upon the heels of the story of his first communion? Can that story be believed, or must we take it that it, too, has been dramatised?

It is impossible to say; but it hardly matters. A boy's first love always seems very serious to him, but always is, in fact, and always ought to be, tentative and experimental; and that statement is as true of the first loves of those whose pilgrimage of love becomes in the end, as his did, a cake walk, as of those who grow up to find love an imperious emotion of which they are condemned to be the obedient slaves.

One point we may safely make. The fact that Adèle Dalbin was a dressmaker's assistant, and that Dumas and his friends associated openly and on equal terms with her and her friends, fixes his social position in the little town in which he lived; and the fact that she threw him over in order to marry a man in an assured position, as soon as she got a chance, shows at once that she was a practical young person and that he had not, as yet, shown any signs that he was likely to succeed in life.

It may or may not be true that the fortress fell and that the young Dumas, at the time when he was junior clerk to the local notary, was allowed to enter the dressmaker's assistant's bedroom by way of the window. Such things do sometimes happen, though not as a matter of routine or a part of the common round, in small French provincial towns; and quadroons are notoriously precocious in gallantry. One suspects the truth of the story only because it is so precisely the sort of story that Dumas would have delighted to tell about himself, and because the exploit related bears so close a resemblance to the exploits which his novels attributed to his musketeers; and one need only add that the chronicler's mention of the name of the lady whose favours he claimed to have enjoyed, as if he thought that the publicity would flatter her vanity, is a proof that the negro blood in his veins was not without its effect upon his sense of the obligations of good taste.

The story, however, led to nothing, and is, therefore, of no importance. The only things with which, at this stage, we need concern ourselves, are Dumas' education and the circumstances which enabled him to get away from Villers-Cotterets and seek his fortune in Paris.

His education, it would seem, was neither very good nor very bad. There is really little to be said about it except that he learnt to read and was fond of reading, and that his preceptor, Abbé Grégoire, though no great scholar, was a competent teacher and a man of taste, who even taught his pupil to write verse. So he acquired a desire, first to write verse, and then to write plays—and that at a time when he must have impressed the casual observer as a young barbarian who preferred his games to his books and was always ready to play truant in order to enjoy such sport as the forest afforded.

Sport was not, of course, in those days regarded as a part of education; but the young Dumas' addiction to it was nevertheless helpful to him. It procured him access, from time to time, to society much better than that in which he normally moved; and his addiction to the writing of verse—though he never, to the end of his days, wrote any but bad verse—enabled him to make a friend in that society whose friendship put new ideas into his head and kindled his ambitions.

He was poor, socially unimportant, and without prospects—so devoid of prospects that, as we have seen, a dressmaker's assistant did not think him good enough to marry. Though he had risen from the position of a notary's errand boy to that of a notary's clerk, there was no likelihood that he would ever rise to become a notary. In order to become one he would have had to buy a practice, and neither he nor his mother had the necessary capital. His earnings were negligible, and she had just, but only just, succeeded in making both ends meet by standing behind the counter of her tobacco shop and mortgaging a strip of land which she had

inherited. When the land was sold and the mortgage was paid off the balance in her favour amounted to ten pounds two shillings and sixpence.

But her son had, in the meantime, made the acquaintance of Adolphe de Leuven.

CHAPTER V

SOCIALLY a wide gulf must have yawned between Alexandre Dumas, the notary's junior clerk, whose mother sold tobacco over the counter, and Adolphe de Leuven, who belonged to the Swedish aristocracy and was living in exile because his father, now a man of letters, had been concerned in the assassination of the Swedish King Gustave III. But the gulf was bridged—to some extent, if not entirely—because, when Adolphe de Leuven came to Villers-Cotterets, Alexandre Dumas was the only person there to whom he could talk about the only subjects which interested him—poetry and the theatre.

They struck up a friendship. They agreed to collaborate in the writing of plays; and Adolphe de Leuven promised that, if Dumas would come to Paris, he would not only take him to the theatres, but would also take him behind the scenes and introduce him to actors.

Nothing came of the collaboration. All the plays of the collaborators were rejected, though both of them were destined, some years later, to write successfully for the stage. But Dumas did, somehow or other, contrive to raise the money required for flying visits to Paris; and Adolphe de Leuven did take him behind the scenes and actually introduced him to Talma; and we may believe, if we like—though here again one suspects a dramatised reminiscence—that Talma, having been told

that he was a notary's clerk, saluted him as "a future Corneille," reminding him that the great Corneille had also begun life as a lawyer's clerk, and laid his hand on his head and proceeded:

"Alexandre Dumas, I baptise you poet in the name of Shakespeare, Corneille and Schiller. Go back to your notary's office in the provinces, resting assured that if you have a true call to the theatre, the angel of poetry will seek you out, wherever you may be, and seize you by the hair of your head, like the prophet Habakkuk, and carry you off to the place where you should be."

Whether that really happened—or whether Dumas, looking backwards, said that it had happened because he thought that it ought to have happened—is, and must remain, uncertain. Enough happened, in any case, to send him home in a mood to be insolent to his notary when reprimanded for absenting himself from the office without leave and to decide him to tell his mother, when the notary dismissed him for his impudence, that he had made up his mind to go to Paris again, with such letters of introduction as he could collect, and see if he could not obtain a situation there and make his fortune. It does not matter whether it is true that he acquired the money for the journey, as he tells us that he did, by winning, at billiards, the cash value of six hundred glasses of absinthe. Nor does it matter whether a fortune-teller really predicted his future glory to his mother, saying:

"I cannot tell you, madam, what your son's fate will be; but I see him, through clouds and by flashes of lightning, as a traveller who crosses lofty mountains in order to arrive at a position which few men reach. I do not say that he is destined to command people, but I

do say that he is destined to speak to them. Your son belongs—I cannot be more precise—to the class which we call 'dominating'."

The prophecy is, perhaps, a shade too accurate for verisimilitude; but one does, at any rate, feel, when one has read it, that if coming events did not throw those shadows before, they were neglecting their plain duty. And one feels further that, if Dumas did not really, when paying his farewell call on Abbé Grégoire, assure that excellent priest that his heart was in the right place, though he did not attend church—that he absented himself from church only from fear of effacing or dulling by habit the wonderfully uplifting impression which his single visit to church had made upon him—that he forgot God only "as one forgets a good father of whose affection one knows that one can always be sure"—he could not anyhow have said anything more dramatically apposite.

And so to Paris: the oyster which his pen was to open.

His father's companions-in-arms did not, as he had expected, tumble over each other in their eagerness to help him. General Verdier, the friendliest of them, being on half pay and out of favour with the Government, could do no more than invite him to dinner and give him good advice. Marshal Victor was too busy to see him. Marshal Jourdan, not knowing that General Dumas had ever had a son, suspected him of being an impostor. General Sebastiani, entrenched behind a room full of secretaries, inspected him unsympathetically. But General Foy was considerate and helpful.

He was a politician as well as a soldier. Dumas had come to him with a recommendation from an influential

political supporter. He could not do much for him. Dumas' incomplete education made that difficult, if not impossible. His uncouth appearance—he had a shock head of frizzled hair, and his unduly long tail coat trailed after him like a provocative Irishman's at Donnybrook Fair—must have added to the difficulty of placing him. But his handwriting was good; and, on the strength of that qualification, his patron procured him a post as copying clerk in the estate office of the Duc d'Orléans in the Palais Royal, at a salary of forty-eight pounds a year.

"General," he said to his benefactor, "for the time being I must earn my living by my handwriting; but some day, I promise you, I shall earn it by my pen."

Or so he says that he said; and whether he really said it or not, it was clearly the *mot de la situation*, seeing that his next years were conscientiously devoted to the unswerving effort to equip himself to justify his boast.

He improved himself for social purposes by having his hair cut and his coat curtailed; and as he was, in those days, tall and slim and as good-looking as it is possible for a quadroon to be, and was an amusing talker, with a turn, if not for epigram, at least for quick repartee, he made a favourable impression in most of the circles to which accident or the friendship of Adolphe de Leuven introduced him. At the same time he did his office work diligently enough to be promoted to a £60 a year post—a promotion which enabled him to bring his mother to Paris to live with him—and read widely, realising that he had much to learn before he could hope to realise his literary ambitions.

Of course, being young and ardent, he also had his

love affairs—if that be the right word for them. It was quite at the beginning of this period of early struggles that he made the acquaintance of Marie-Catherine Lebay—a seamstress living in the same block with him, who bore him a son, destined to win literary distinction almost equal to his own—his Duc de Chartres as he airily calls him. It was towards the end of it that he began an affair, of which more presently, with Mélanie Waldor, the wife of an officer stationed in a provincial garrison. The cake walk of which his pilgrimage of love was to consist was thus beginning to be fast and furious.

The Memoirs, however, tell us little about it. Dumas never, like the other great lights of the Romantic Movement, took love seriously, and never looked, as they did (though usually in vain), for sentimental finality or continuity. Love, for him, was a relaxation, though a necessary one; a diversion, not a servitude or a compelling interest. The one enduring love of his life was his love for his mother. In that domestic relation he was as dutiful as his father or as Uncle Tom in his cabin. In the others he was not. If his passions were sometimes volcanic, the eruptions were quickly over, though constantly renewed, and his career was fragmentary and episodical: no single drama; hardly even a series of short stories; little more than a succession of anecdotes.

Already, young as he was, his literary aspirations were more to him than any of his love affairs; and his chief trouble was the obstruction and hostility which they encountered in the office. His official superiors there were bureaucrats who comprehended and approved of no ambitions except those of junior clerks to become senior clerks and those of senior clerks to become

sectional or departmental chiefs. They reproached him, ridiculed him, delayed his promotion, and docked his salary.

"Do you think," he was asked, "that you, with your two-penny-halfpenny education, are likely to write anything as good as the works of Corneille, Racine and Molière?"

"I hope," he replied, "to write works which will, at any rate, be different from theirs."

They also asked him whether he thought he could write as well as Casimir Delavigne who sat in the same office with him, but high above him, holding a well-paid sinecure, and he replied again that he hoped, at any rate, to write differently from M. Casimir Delavigne.

And so he did, and that was why he succeeded and was able to say, only a little while after this attempt to snub him, when told that M. Casimir Delavigne was not in the theatre on the night on which he achieved his first great triumph, that it was as bad as if the criminal had failed to turn up on the scaffold on the morning of the execution.

It is quite likely that one of his reasons for writing differently from Casimir Delavigne was that he did not know how to write like him and that his ignorance, no less than his newly acquired knowledge, was one of the sources of his strength.

He was no scholar—his scholarship was the sort of scholarship that any one might acquire by a diligent study of Mangnall's Questions, and the history which he knew was mainly anecdotal history. Though he began by writing in verse, he was no poet; nor was he, like Victor Hugo, a conscious propagandist of the principles of the

Romantic Movement. He did, indeed, practise the doctrines which Hugo had preached in the preface to his unacted play "Cromwell,"—that eloquent and dogmatic manifesto which expounded the romantic programme. He practised them more successfully than Hugo himself. But he practised them neither as Hugo's pupil nor as Hugo's master. He practised them, we may almost say, by accident, building better than he knew because he built to please himself.

He did not, like Hugo and his disciples, distinguish between the classical and romantic schools of literature. He distinguished only between the tedious and the amusing; and his object was to be, not an innovator, but an entertainer. His models and teachers were not French, but English and American writers: Shakespeare, and Scott and Fennimore Cooper. He saw no reason why he should not make French history as interesting as they had made English history. A superficial reading of French memoirs had put him on the track of the material he needed. He was a born story-teller with an instinctive perception of what would be effective on the stage and sufficiently a playgoer to have grasped the secrets of theatrical technique. On the other hand, he had no such superstitious respect for history as to shrink from taking liberties with it when he thought he could improve it, and no such regard for the classical traditions of the French stage as to be prejudiced in favour of the dramatic "unities," or to admit that only classical and scriptural subjects were "noble" enough for the national theatre.

That, so far as one can sum the matter up in a paragraph, is how he came to write "Henri III," rushing in rashly, so to say, where angels feared to tread, at a time

when Victor Hugo was only threatening to do so, but at an opportune hour, because the theatre was in a bad way, the followers of the classical tradition were second- or third-rate writers, and there was ample room for a dramatist who could give people what they wanted.

It was a want of which Talma himself was conscious and had spoken. "I ask for Shakespeare," he had said to Hugo, shortly before his death, "and they give me Ducis."* Baron Taylor, of the Comédie Française, was equally aware of the need, but had not the least idea how to meet it, though he was looking to Hugo to do so; and while Hugo—already a poet of established reputation—was still talking of what he could do and meant to do, the audacious young quadroon—a mere junior clerk in the estate office of the Duc d'Orléans—stepped down in front of him and launched the Romantic Movement before he was ready.

Audacious is, indeed, the word, for the theatre is a formidable stronghold. Its walls are not, like the walls of Jericho, always waiting to fall down flat before the blast of a newcomer's trumpet. Its garrison is generally very suspicious of newcomers; and much sapping and mining is required before the breach can be entered; so that the story of Dumas' assault needs to be told in detail.

* Author of a bad translation of Hamlet.

CHAPTER VI

DUMAS himself is practically our sole witness to the story of his triumphant assault on the national theatre.

It loses nothing in the telling—no story told by him ever lost anything in the telling. Life, as he saw it, was a series of dramatic situations in each of which there was a splendid part for him. Yet one feels, when one reads the story, that, though he may have improved and dramatised it here and there, it must, in the main, be true. Without the audacity, self-assurance and self-possession which he pictures himself displaying, he could not have surmounted the obstacles in his path.

They were real and great obstacles.

He was poor. His salary, when his mother came to Paris to keep house for him, was only sixty pounds a year; and she contributed to the budget only the capital sum of eighty pounds—the proceeds of the sale of her tobacco shop—which was gradually drawn upon and exhausted. The expenses of his second establishment—that of the mother of his Duc de Chartres, from whom he had now separated—had also to be faced, though one does not know how large a proportion of them he felt called upon to defray.

He was not in Society. His social standing was that of a junior clerk, not that of a general's son. Even the rising young men of letters among his contemporaries,

whose rival he was presently to be—Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny, and Alfred de Musset—were strangers to him, and would have looked down on him, if they had known him, from Olympian heights of social superiority. His one weak link with social, literary and artistic circles higher than his own was the friendship of Adolphe de Leuven; and the theatrical and other personages to whom Adolphe introduced him were mainly Bohemians of no importance.

In a way, no doubt, they were helpful. Rubbing shoulders with them in the cafés was a part of education—an object lesson—an instructive as well as an agreeable relief after the dull life of a copying clerk on a three-legged stool in an office. Hints could be picked up from them: such a hint as one of them dropped when, after hearing Dumas tell a funny story after dinner, he exclaimed: "Good gracious! Why don't you write that? It's the very thing for a vaudeville."

That was the starting-point. Dumas began, with collaborators—Adolphe de Leuven and another—as a writer of vaudevilles, which achieved a small success and put a little money in his pockets; but when he spent the proceeds—exactly twelve pounds—in publishing a volume of short stories at his own expense, only four copies of the work were sold.

Moreover, his hierarchical superiors in the office were dissatisfied with him. It seemed to them that the writing of vaudevilles was incompatible with the dignity of a copying clerk in the estate office of the Duc d'Orléans. They sent for him and told him so. They overloaded him with work, and made things uncomfortable for him in various ways. The Duc d'Orléans wrote with his own

hands a minute to the effect that there would be no bonus for M. Alexandre Dumas. He was further told that, if he was absolutely determined to write, he must not write that sort of rubbish, but must take his hierarchical superior, M. Casimir Delavigne, for his model. Whereto he replied, in the best Dumas manner, with the pride that apes humility:

"Sir, I am not as old as M. Casimir Delavigne, who was made poet laureate in 1811. I have not been educated, like M. Casimir Delavigne, in one of the best schools in Paris. I am only twenty-two; and I am educating myself, at the expense, I daresay, of my health, seeing that what I learn—and I assure you I am learning a great deal—is learnt at hours at which other people are playing or sleeping. So I cannot, at this moment, do what M. Delavigne Casimir is doing. But mark my words, strange as they may seem to you: if I did not believe that I should, in the future, do something very different from what M. Casimir Delavigne is doing, I would anticipate your wishes and swear a solemn oath to abandon literature for ever."

And so saying—or soon after saying that—he wrote "Christine" and "Henri III."

But how to get these plays produced? How even to get a hearing for them?

That was his next problem, and it was not an easy one to solve. It was open to him, as to any man, to submit a play to the management of the Comédie Française; but what was the good of doing that? Innumerable plays were so submitted, only to lie for years in pigeonholes, accumulating dust. It was as unlikely, in the view of the management, that a copying clerk's play would

meet its requirements as that a good thing could come out of Nazareth. He must obtain an introduction to Baron Taylor, the managing director of the theatre, be accorded an interview, and make a favourable impression.

But how?

No one in the office was able or willing to help him. The only person connected with the national theatre whom he knew was the prompter who sometimes came to the Palais Royal to distribute "orders" among the clerks; and the prompter could tell him only that, unless he could "get at" Taylor, the chance that his manuscript would receive attention was remote. So he laid his difficulties before a colleague who, though he had no influence, was sympathetic:

"Do you know Baron Taylor?" I asked Lassagne.

"No," he replied, "but Charles Nodier is his intimate friend."

"Well, what of that?"

"Didn't you tell me that once, at a performance of his 'Vampire,' you sat next to him, and talked to him all through the evening?"

"Certainly."

"Then write to Charles Nodier."

"He will have forgotten all about me."

"He never forgets anything. Write to him."

It was a happy thought. Nodier was the chief librarian at the Arsenal: a very learned man, very brilliant in his way, but more famous for his literary friendships than for his literary work. His place in literary history is that of the patron of the Romantic Movement. Such young Romantics as Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Musset and Vigny, looked up to him as their literary godfather and read

their poetry to him and to each other at his Sunday receptions.

Those receptions were very simple affairs. Nodier, though hospitable, was not rich. His way of life, and of entertaining, was so simple that, at an early hour of the Sunday evening—always the same hour—Mme Nodier used to pass through the drawing-room, carrying a warming-pan, and he, preferring to keep early hours, used to follow her and be tucked up in his bed, leaving his guests to dance until the small hours with his daughter, Marie, and Delphine Gay, the so-called Muse of the Romantic Movement, and a few other literary ladies.

The fact that Dumas, though he was now seven-and-twenty, knew none of them, and was known to none of them, shows how completely an "outsider" he still was at this stage, when he approached Nodier; and though it was true that he had once spoken to Nodier in the theatre—and had then seen Nodier thrown out of the theatre for the queer offence of hissing his own play because he realised how bad a play it was when he saw it performed—he must have been very sanguine if he expected Nodier to respond to his appeal.

But Nodier did respond to it, though two conflicting stories are told of the manner and circumstances of the response.

According to his own account, he wrote to Nodier, and Nodier wrote to Taylor, and Taylor made an appointment. According to Marie Nodier, who also wrote Memoirs, he knocked at her father's door, and she happened to open it, and persuaded her father to accord him an interview which he had intended to excuse himself from granting, because she found the caller such an

affable and personable young man. In any case the visit gained him two separate advantages: a standing invitation to Nodier's Sundays, at which he made the acquaintance of the Romantics whose rival he was so soon to be, and an introduction to Baron Taylor who asked him to call, bringing his manuscript with him.

Taylor, when he called, was in his bath, listening to another man who was reading a play to him. Having left his bath, and dismissed the other man, he went back to bed and there listened to Dumas' "Christine." It pleased him, as "Captain Swift" pleased Tree when Haddon Chambers insisted upon reading it to him in the hot room of a Turkish bath to which he had pursued him. He arranged that it should be read again, a day or two later, to the company at the theatre. The Committee seemed equally enthusiastic, and a newspaper paragraphist wrote that the Théâtre Français had accepted "unanimously and with acclamation a tragedy in verse and in five acts by an absolutely unknown author." It looked as if Dumas had taken all the obstacles in his stride.

But he had not. The paragraphist had been premature. The Committee had made its reservations. It had resolved to take another opinion—that of a M. Picard; and M. Picard's opinion was discouraging. Dumas went to see him, accompanied by one of the actors. He was very polite, but his politeness was ironical. He enquired after the health of his visitors. He bade them be seated. He untied the manuscript and spread it on the table, and smiled, and smiled, and then:

"My dear sir," he asked, "have you any other means of earning a livelihood?"

"Sir," replied Dumas, "I am a clerk, at sixty pounds a year, in the office of the Duc d'Orléans."

"In that case," proceeded M. Picard, "my advice to you is to go back to your office and resume your duties as a clerk."

The rebuff was unpleasant and caused a hitch in the proceedings. It was followed by other rebuffs and other hitches. Another play on the same theme by another author blocked the way. Another opinion was taken—that of Samson, the actor. Samson suggested, and, indeed, insisted upon, innumerable alterations. Dumas wrangled with him about them; and the upshot was that, while he was wrangling, he wrote "Henri III"; and "Henri III," instead of "Christine," was the first play of his which the national theatre produced. It was read and accepted on September 17, 1828. The curtain rose on it on February 16, 1829.

Even so, however, the trouble was not over; and the interval between the two dates was stormy.

There was a squabble in the theatre over the allocation of the parts. There was an attempt on the part of jealous and envious persons to get the piece banned by the censor on the ground that "the authority which honours the theatre with its protection" ought not to sanction the performance of any play at the performance of which "the curiosity of a son or a daughter cannot be innocently satisfied when they ask: 'What is the meaning of that?'."* In the office an ultimatum was presented by a departmental chief.

It sounds absurd and shocking in retrospect; but there

* They might have asked, for example, who and what were the "mignons" at the Court of Henri III.

may at the time have been something to be said for the departmental chief's point of view. The swelling of Dumas' head may have been more apparent to him than the value of its contents; and the fact that actors and actresses—more particularly actresses—were continually dropping in at the office to waste the time of one of his copying clerks may have seemed to him a menace to official routine and discipline. It would be the same, one imagines, to-day, if actors and actresses—more particularly actresses—paid that ostentatious attention in office hours to a junior clerk in one of our banks or insurance offices.

At any rate, Dumas was sent for, on the eve of the triumph which was to make him a great man, and told that literature and the duties of a civil servant were irreconcilable enemies, and that he must choose between them. He made his choice without hesitation, and received his dismissal. Whereupon he comments scornfully, gibbeting the Duc d'Orléans as an employer:

"The posts in the Prince's office were, for the most part, so poorly paid that we could hardly live on our salaries. Consequently we all had to carry on some other business in order to relieve our indigence. Some of the clerks had married wives who kept small drapers' shops. Others were keeping livery stables; and others, again, had opened cheap restaurants in the Latin Quarter, where, every day, at five o'clock, they exchanged the Duke's pen for the waiter's apron.

"Nothing was said to them. They were never accused of compromising the Duke's dignity. On the contrary, their industry was thought natural and they were praised for it. But I, who did not feel called upon to marry a

shop, who had no capital to invest in a livery stable, and was accustomed to place my napkin on my knees and not on my arm—I was regarded as a criminal because I had sought my way out in literature, and had my salary stopped because I had had a tragedy and a drama accepted for the Comédie Française."

And he adds that he insisted that, as it was from the Duc d'Orléans that he had received his appointment, only the Duc d'Orléans could terminate his engagement, and it was then that he was shown the notification, already quoted, in the Duc's hand-writing, that "the bonus of M. Alexandre Dumas, who is occupying himself with literature, is not to be paid."

It was not paid; but it was too late to crush Dumas in that way. His accepted play was now a security on which he could borrow money to go on with. Laffitte, the banker, lent him some; and then, as the first night approached, he drew further on his stock of audacity. He went back to the Palais Royal, succeeded in seeing the Duc d'Orléans, and demanded "a favour, or rather an act of justice"—that of his attendance at the theatre on the first night of "Henri III":

"For a whole year," he said, "Your Highness has been given to understand that I am a vain and pig-headed young fool. For a whole year I have been maintaining that I am a humble poet and a hard worker. Your Highness, without troubling to hear what I had to say, took the view of my accusers. Perhaps it would have been better for Your Highness to wait. Your Highness thought otherwise, and did not wait. To-morrow the public will hear my case. Come to the trial, Monseigneur —that is the request which I have called to make."

And the Duc d'Orléans promised, and kept his promise, altering the hour of a dinner-party which he was giving in order to be able to bring all his guests to the theatre in time for the rising of the curtain, helping the success which it was no longer in his power to hinder, and so sustaining, with beneficent condescension, the rôle of patron of the arts. After the curtain had fallen on a complete triumph, he sent for the copying clerk and complimented him, assuring him that the public had given judgment in his favour, and that he hoped to retain him in his service, but in an improved position.

Thus a single night made all the difference. Whether Dumas really said all the haughty things which he tells us that he said to the Duc d'Orléans himself and to the official superiors who, after bullying him, cringed to him, may, indeed, be doubted. It is unlikely that he would, if he had really said them, have been offered, as he was, and have accepted, as he did, the sinecure office of assistant in the Palais Royal Library; and one suspects that it was only in retrospect that the inferiority complex, due to the negro blood in his veins, asserted itself with that extremely offensive aggressiveness. But he did, unquestionably, like Byron, after the publication of the first two cantos of "Childe Harold," wake up and find himself famous.

In the twinkling of an eye he had been transformed from a nobody into a personage. He was asked to sit to Deveria for his portrait and to David d'Angers for his bust. The Duchesse d'Orléans enquired after his mother's health. Great actresses welcomed him in their dressing rooms, though Mlle. Mars did once say, after he had

gone: "Quick. Open the window and let out the smell of the nigger." And he had—what is more important—launched the Romantic Movement on the French stage; and on that plea issue was instantly joined.

The credit for launching that Movement is, indeed, commonly given to Victor Hugo. The battle royal was, as all the world knows, eventually fought when Hugo produced "Hernani" and Théophile Gautier put on a scarlet waistcoat and recruited a claque in the studios to support him against the old stagers. But the first battle—the battle of the frontiers, as we may call it—was fought when Dumas produced "Henri III."

There was no row in the theatre. It had not been known beforehand that there would be anything to make a row about. But after the curtain had fallen, and some critics had made reservations and others had denounced the piece as a "monstrosity" because of the liberties which the author had taken with history, the old stagers raised their voices in protest and delivered their attack.

It was the view of those old stagers—Arnoult, Jouy, Viennet and Andrieux are their forgotten names—that the national theatre was, and ought to continue to be, the close preserve of classical tragedy and comedy, that mere drama had no place there, and that no works ought to be performed within the sacred precincts except those of Corneille, Racine and Molière, and such modern writers as were content, as they themselves were, to imitate these masters. They expressed their view in a collective letter to the King.

"Sire," they wrote, "the harm done is already immense. If it is allowed to go on a few months more, it will be without remedy, and the theatre founded by Louis the

Great, closed to the works which delighted the most polite court and the most enlightened people in the world, will have fallen below the level of the most miserable stages of the mountebanks' booths—or, rather, the Théâtre Français will have passed out of existence."

But Charles X was unmoved by these observations.

"Gentlemen," he wrote in reply, prompted, it is believed, by his witty minister, M. de Martignac, "I cannot do anything to help you. I am entitled only, like any other Frenchman, to the place of a spectator in the stalls."

So they fell back, discomfited, and Dumas triumphed, and walked the boulevards with the proud air of a young man who had grown so tall that his sublime head smote the stars.

CHAPTER VII

DUMAS' active literary career covered a period of approximately forty years. In the course of those forty years he wrote sixty-seven plays, published in twenty-five volumes and produced at seventeen theatres, ninety-two novels published in one hundred and seventy-eight volumes, thirty-two historical works published in thirty-six volumes, eighteen books of travel published in thirty-five volumes, and fourteen miscellaneous works published in twenty-six volumes—a total of two hundred and thirteen books published in three hundred volumes.*

Most of them have long since been forgotten; but the best of them still survive. Enough of them survive to justify those who have spoken of their author as "the greatest amuser of the nineteenth century." He did not, indeed, write them all with his own pen. The list of the collaborators whom he hired to help him is rather a long one, as we shall see; but as only one of them ever made any separate reputation by the independent production of work of the same kind, we may safely take it that he had a great power of making dry bones live.

His biographer, however, would have but little space left for biography if he paused to analyse them. His

* In the Calmann-Levy edition. The original volumes were shorter and more numerous.

simpler, but not less interesting, task is to depict the man—to consider how success affected him and what was his outlook on life, and his way of life, when, having money in his pocket, he was able to indulge his tastes and amuse himself as he chose.

For the success of "Henri III" at the Comédie Française was no mere flash in the pan. It was followed very quickly by the success of "Christine" at the Odéon; and there, too, the triumph was that of a Movement as well as a dramatist. This time there was a disturbance in the theatre, almost amounting to a riot. The opposition of the old stagers of the classical school was shouted down by a claque of fifty lumbermen brought in from a saw-mill owned by a sympathiser of the Romantics; and when it appeared, and it was agreed, at a supper given after the first performance, that some of Dumas' verses would be the better for rewriting, Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny sat up all night to rewrite them for him —a pleasant proof that the Romantics of those days were indeed a band of brothers.

They did not long remain united—such bands of brothers seldom do. It was not long before jealousies and political differences estranged them; and it may very well have been that their common determination to break down the barrier which kept young men with new ideas out of the national theatre was the only real link between them. In all other matters they seem to have differed from each other as chalk from cheese, belonging socially to different spheres, and being accustomed to take widely different views of their sentimental commitments and obligations.

Most of the Romantics, as is well known, trained

themselves to write sentimental books by living sentimental lives. The case of Dumas furnishes the one notable exception to that rule.

Alfred de Vigny was an aristocrat and the slave of sentiment. He worshipped an actress as a Madonna and withdrew to his "ivory tower" when she threw him over for a *jeune premier* because that was not how she wanted to be worshipped. Victor Hugo was a *parvenu* and the master of sentiment. He picked up a loose woman at a fancy dress ball, made her his mistress, raised a subscription among his friends in order that he might be able to support her in a style worthy of his genius and her charms, lived happily with her ever afterwards, and compelled both Society and his wife and family to accept her at his and her valuation.

One finds nothing of that sort—nor anything like Alfred de Musset's hectic passion for George Sand or Balzac's life long fidelity to Mme Hanska—in Dumas' amorous career. Many women passed through his life—more women, probably, than passed through the lives of any of the others; but there is no evidence that any woman ever made him suffer or that any woman's love ever, even for a moment, really mattered to him. There is, indeed, a good deal of evidence to the contrary. He was a Bohemian; he was promiscuous; and his whole attitude towards women, as exhibited in his Memoirs, seems to reflect the colour of his skin.

It displays the arrogance which one associates, rightly or wrongly, with the volcanic ardour of African lovers. He not only boasts of his conquests—he sniggers about them after the manner of a precociously debauched schoolboy, a love affair seeming to be nothing to him

except a humorous incident which furnishes a good story for the smoking-room. He speaks thus, for instance, when speaking of the preparations for the production of "Henri III":

"I attended the rehearsals with great assiduity, attracted, as I myself maintained, by my interest in the work, but, as Mlle Mars insisted, by the interest which I took in a beautiful and charming person who had a two-line part in the drama—Mlle Virginie Bourbier."

Just that, and then Mlle Virginie Bourbier passes out of the story, and another actress comes into it—a lady on whose behalf the actor Firmin had requested Dumas to exert his influence with theatrical managers. Firmin having assured him that his interest in the lady was solely artistic, he pressed his own suit, and we read:

"My recommendations failed; but my beautiful charmer saw that that was not my fault and was not angry with me. . . Meanwhile I began my siege of the fortress.

"At first I thought it was going to be a ten years' siege, like that of Troy. I was mistaken. The siege, like the siege of Antwerp by the Duc d'Orléans, lasted only for three weeks.

"If my lady readers are honest with themselves, they will admit, as our French engineers have admitted to the glory of General Chasse, that a resistance of three weeks is very honourable, and that few citadels, however formidably fortified, are able to hold out so long as that."

And the curtain falls on that, and we come to the story—or, rather, the two stories—of the little affair with Marie Dorval, the actress already referred to as the object of Alfred de Vigny's misguided adoration.

Dumas met her, he tells us, for the first time, at one o'clock in the morning, somewhere near the Odéon Theatre. She was in her carriage, and he was on foot. She put her head out of the carriage window and called to him. He continues:

"I turned round; the carriage stopped: I opened the door.

" 'You're M. Dumas, aren't you?' asked the lady in the carriage.

" 'Yes, madam.'

" 'Jump into the carriage and kiss me. You're very clever, and you seem to know all about women.'

"I laughed, and I kissed the woman who thus accosted me. It was Marie Dorval."

And so a fresh affair was launched—a short-lived affair of no more real importance than the others, except for the fact that Marie Dorval was a personage, but worth noting because of the tone in which Dumas tells us of its termination, shortly after the Revolution of 1830.

He had just written "Antony," that popular drama of adultery and jealousy, and he wanted to read it to her. He called on her for that purpose—but not for that purpose only; and, to his great astonishment, she, who had begun her acquaintance with him by asking him to kiss her, now refused to kiss him. It seemed to him that an explanation was called for.

" 'Why won't you kiss me?' " I asked her.

" 'Because, like Marion Delorme,' I am acquiring a new virginity.'

" 'Stuff and nonsense.'

" 'It is true, on my word of honour. I am becoming a good girl again.'

" 'Well, my dear, I was just talking to you about one revolution that I'd been mixed up in. Here is another. Who the devil is responsible for it?'

" 'Alfred de Vigny.'

" 'You are in love with him?'

" 'Don't talk to me about it. I am madly in love with him.'

" 'In that case, my dear, receive my compliments. Alfred de Vigny is a poet of great talent, and he is also a gentleman. Naturally you prefer him to a mulatto like me.'

" 'You think so?' asked Dorval, with an inflection in her voice which no one but she can produce.

" 'Yes, I give you my word of honour that I think so.'

" 'Then you didn't come here with any idea of——?'

"I laughed."

And so on and so forth. It is another quite unimportant story. Its only sequel is that Dumas' play provided Marie Dorval with a good part. It is even possible that that is the only part of the story that is true. But it was worth relating because Dumas told it, and because his telling of it is an unconscious revelation of his point of view—a further proof, not only of his inability to take romance seriously, but also of the wide gulf which separated him from those of the Romantics who were, to use his own word, "gentlemen," careful of the reputations of ladies who favoured them, as Alfred de Musset was when he wrote:

MARIE DORVAL

Si vous croyez que je vais dire
Qui j'ose aimer,
Je ne voudrais pour un empire
Vous la nommer.

One cannot picture Dumas following that rule when an opportunity of glorifying himself or amusing his readers presented itself. The African blood forbade. Sex meant too much to him and sentiment too little for any such decorous reticence to be possible; and he probably pictured the love affairs of all theatrical celebrities as normally, if not necessarily, a series of *chassés-croisés*—as, no doubt, they often were, though it hardly became their admirers to say so exultantly at the tops of their voices and tell all the world the names of all the women with whom they had slept. But he was, at the very time of his singular conversation with Marie Dorval, engaged in an affair which did involve, if not sentiment, at least the jealousy which is akin to it.

"When I was writing 'Antony'," he tells us, "I was in love with a woman who was far from being beautiful, but who made me horribly jealous. The reason of my jealousy was that she was in the position of my Adèle, having a husband who was an officer in the army, and that the fiercest of all kinds of jealousy is that which a husband inspires, because, however jealous one may be of the husband, one has not the right to quarrel with his wife as her husband might quarrel with her lover."

Jealousy of that sort is the theme of 'Antony.' The curtain falls on a thrilling scene in which the jealous lover has the happy thought, when discovery is imminent, of killing his mistress in order to save her honour,

and saying to the jealous husband, when he enters: "Elle me resistait. Je l'ai assassinée." But that, of course, was not how things worked out in the story of real life which supplied the stage play with its emotional substance.

The lady's name was Mélanie Waldor. She was five years Dumas' senior, and she made no pretence of being in love with her husband, who was stationed in some provincial garrison. An introduction to her father, who had lately had a play produced at the Odéon, brought Dumas an introduction to her. She was by way of being a woman of letters—one of the minor Muses of the Romantic Movement, known to Chateaubriand, and a guest, at times, in the salon of Mme Récamier. Dumas read one or two of his plays to her, and then sought her favours with brusque precipitation.

They were at first refused with virtuous indignation—with such a show of it, at all events, that the ardent suitor was frightened into apologies. "Forgive my madness of yesterday," he wrote to her. "Forgive the candour with which I expressed myself. The energy with which you repudiated the suggestion that our friendship should become something more than friendship has driven all thought of such a thing out of my mind." But that was an exaggeration; and Mélanie's indignation had also been exaggerated.

Dumas returned to the attack. He had no difficulty—or very little difficulty—in persuading Mélanie to visit him in an apartment which he hired for the purpose of receiving her. She pretended to believe—the belief must surely have been a pretence—that nothing beyond friendship and literary conversation was contem-

plated. He had apparently given assurances to that effect. He had, at any rate, written: "I shall ask you only to take off your hat and your veil." But he did not keep his promise; and it is unlikely that she seriously expected him to keep it. He asked her, and found her willing, to take off more than her hat and veil. The fortress fell on September 12, 1827; and the only trouble was that Mélanie desired moderation in love-making and Dumas did not.

"Believe me," he wrote, evidently in reply to some protest of hers, "when I tell you that I love love-making so much only because it is such a precious link between us. The moments which follow the love-making are, perhaps, more delightful than the love-making itself. Yes, I know how to extract the full flavour from love."

And then came the jealousy; but Dumas dealt with the situation which it created very differently from the hero of his play.

He wrote about it, indeed, in language which would have been quite appropriate to the play:

"At last you understand me. You know what love is because you know what jealousy is. There is no other emotion which one can compare with it. To think that these imbecile founders of religions have invented a hell in which physical torture is suffered—and they knew something about physical torture. I pity them. The real hell would be one in which I should see you for ever in another man's arms."

That apparently because Captain Waldor had announced his intention of coming to Paris to see his wife. But Dumas, though jealous, was not blinded by his

jealousy. The terrible emotion found him very wide awake and much more practical than Antony.

He had a friend in the War Office. He rushed round to see his friend and persuaded him to tear up the paper giving Captain Waldor the leave for which he applied. He did that, not once only, but three times, with the result that Captain Waldor did not come to Paris until Dumas, having been attracted by another lady, did not care twopence whether he came or not.

For that time arrived, and was not long in arriving. The visible proof that it had arrived was actually given on the night on which the great drama of jealousy was produced at the Porte Saint-Martin.

The triumph was immense, surpassing that won by either "Henri III" or "Christine." The author was mobbed by an enthusiastic crowd. His coat tails—he was attired in a magnificent green coat—were pulled off and torn up to be distributed among his admirers as souvenirs. His piece was acclaimed as a manifesto asserting the right of God-given love to override the man-made marriage law. At last, it seemed to that Romantic generation, the theatre had given human nature its due and recognized the eternal verities. But the drama of real life which had inspired this dramatic manifesto was coming to its end, if it had not already ended. Dumas had got rid of his love for Mélanie Waldor by writing about it.

She had come to the theatre to witness his triumph. He had allotted her a box and promised to come and see her in it. But he forgot to come; and before the curtain fell, she was crying her eyes out at this conclusive proof that his passion had subsided in indifference—a proof

which was renewed when, only a very little later, he "recognized" Marie Dumas, the baby daughter whom Bell Krebsamer*—an actress of no importance or distinction—had borne to him about a couple of months before.

And that was the end of that.

There was no open quarrel. Dumas and Mélanie met again from time to time, as they were bound to do, moving, as they did, to some extent, in the same circles in Paris. They even occasionally exchanged letters. But nothing came either of the meetings or of the correspondence. Mélanie, it seems, consoled herself as best she could by writing sentimental poetry. "Life," she wrote in one memorable passage, obviously inspired by the recollection of this sentimental disappointment, "possesses the secret of teaching us how to fall in love with death."

Dumas needed no consolation. The episode was then for him only one of many jolly memories—a story with which to regale his readers; and it is worth noting, as further evidence of the sort of man he was, that, at the time when he told the story, and confided to the world that the woman who had loved him was "far from beautiful," Mélanie Waldor was still alive. She outlived him, dying, at the age of seventy-five, in 1871.

Meanwhile the cake walk continued, interrupted, as we have next to note, by the interlude of a revolution.

* The lady, apparently, concerning whom he tells us that her resistance had lasted for three weeks.

CHAPTER VIII

THE story of the Revolution of 1830 will not be looked for in these pages.

It was a great event to the politicians, but not to Dumas. His attitude towards it reminds one of an undergraduate plunging into the fray in his first town-and-gown row, or the hot-blooded Irishman who asked: "Is this a private fight, or may any one join in?" It figures in his career mainly as an interruption of the cake walk, the partner whom he abandoned in order to take part in it being the lady who, as a passage in the Memoirs, quoted in the last chapter, relates, offered an honourable resistance of three weeks' duration, before surrendering to the assault.

He had no political grievances; he had no politics. He neither loved nor hated his patron, the Duc d'Orléans, who was to emerge from the turmoil as King Louis-Philippe. He had no better reason for proclaiming himself a Republican than the fact that his father had been one before him and that high offices and sinecures were monopolised by autocrats. He was so far from expecting a revolution that he was on the point of starting for a honeymoon with Bell Krebsamer when it broke out. But he felt that the honeymoon could wait, and that a revolution in which he played no part would be artistically incomplete.

The honeymoon did wait, notwithstanding the birth

of his daughter, Marie Dumas—"one of those living souvenirs," her father was afterwards to write, "which change sorrow into joy, tears into smiles"—who, like his son, was duly "recognized." The Revolution proceeded; and Dumas put on his "sports" suit, and said to his servant:

"Joseph, go to the armourer's and get me a double-barrelled gun and two hundred cartridges."

He set out merely as an armed spectator. He was not in the confidence of the revolutionary leaders, who knew him only as a dramatic author. No part in the movement had been assigned to him; but he assigned himself one when a medical student, whose acquaintance he had made in the street, remarking that he was dressed as if he were about to go shooting, reminded him that the shooting season had not yet begun.

"I know, but I am going to open the season," was his reply.

Or so he tells us, leaving us in doubt whether he is really relating a fact or merely dramatising a memory; and that is a doubt which haunts the reader through the greater part of his narrative.

It may or may not be true that it was he who first proposed the throwing up of barricades. It may or may not be true that it was he who called on Lafayette and, by his eloquence and sarcasm, induced that elderly reformer to let the revolutionists push him along in front. These stories and the air with which they are told do certainly suggest the fly on the wheel of the coach persuaded that it dominates the situation and controls the movements of the vehicle. But he, as certainly, did, in his boisterous

way, make himself prominent, and two of the stories which he tells of himself are well attested.

He did, when the Artillery Museum was being ransacked for arms, carry off some of its most precious treasures—a suit of armour once worn by François I and an arquebus once carried by Charles IX—not in order to don the former and fire the latter, but in order to prevent others from doing so and to take care of them, on behalf of the State, until the disturbances were over: a service eventually rewarded by an official permit to visit the Museum on days on which it was closed to the general public. And he also served the cause by a really dashing expedition to fetch powder from the Soissons Arsenal.

Though the Tuileries had been stormed by the mob, and the private correspondence of kings and emperors had been torn up and thrown out of the windows, and the royal bedchambers had been invaded, and drunken rioters of both sexes had danced the cancan in costumes extracted from the royal wardrobe, there was still a chance—and even a fair prospect—that this triumph would prove to be a mere flash in the pan.

Charles X was at Saint-Cloud. Marshal Marmont was with him. They had troops with them whom they might be able to trust. They might march on Paris, and if they did—so Dumas heard Lafayette say—the Revolution would collapse because the revolutionists had only four thousand rounds of ammunition.

"Shall I go and get you some?" Dumas asked him.

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Where are you going to get it?"

"Where it is stored—at Soissons."

"They won't let you have it."

"Then I shall take it."

"Take it?"

"Certainly."

"By force?"

"Why not? We took the Louvre by force."

A dramatised dialogue, no doubt, written as we should expect the author of "The Three Musketeers" to write it, followed by a narrative which one must suppose to be similarly dramatised; but the dramatised story is in substance a true story, supported, in its main outline, by an official report published in the *Moniteur*. Dumas did volunteer to fetch the powder from Soissons, though Soissons was credibly reported to be a Royalist stronghold, and his offer was accepted. An order to the commandant to hand it over to him—an order not really worth the paper that it was written on—was drafted and signed by General Gerard, above whose signature Dumas himself interpolated the words "Minister of War." He set off with it, accompanied only by a lad named Bard, whom he picked up on the way. He got to Soissons and he came back, bringing the powder with him and leaving the tricolour flying, instead of the fleur-de-lis, on the cathedral tower.

It was magnificent. It would have been a magnificent feat even for a soldier of fortune. It impresses us as doubly magnificent when we remember that the man who achieved it was merely a dramatic author, occupying a position in the country which one might compare to that of Sir Hall Caine on the morning after one of his theatrical triumphs at Drury Lane; and that the

account which he gives of it is probably rather better than the actual facts.

He had, it is true, an advantage which he omits to mention. The supposed Royalist stronghold was, in fact, honeycombed with Republicanism and garrisoned by troops on the point of deserting the Royalist cause. Had it been otherwise the bluff would have been called, and Dumas, instead of returning in triumph to Paris on a powder cart, would have been shot to death by a firing party with his back to a barrack wall.

But what of that? He did not know—even if he had guessed, it would have been impossible for him to be sure—that the bluff would not be called; and he bluffed with the air of a man who trusted bluff, as other men have trusted faith, to remove mountains, and whose motto really was: *De l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et de l'audace, et la France est sauvée.* His exaggerations may be forgiven—an effort may even be made to believe them all—because he did, in truth, live, for a night and a day, the adventurous life of his own Porthos, Athos and Aramis.

The adventure began as a race against time. A post-boy had to be shot (though only with blank cartridge) and thrown out into the road, and left there without his boots, so that he could not pursue, because he would not drive fast enough. Even so it was only with the help of a citizen of Soissons—a Republican sympathiser whom he met on the road—that Dumas was able to get into Soissons, at a late hour, after the town gates had been closed. Shelter for the night was found for him in the house of his new friend's mother, Mme Hutin. He and she and her son and her cook sat up all night, stitch-

ing two curtains and a sheet together, to make a tricolour flag; and Hutin and Bard were sent off at dawn to raise it, after pulling down and tearing up the fleur-de-lis, on the cathedral tower, with the injunction:

"If the sexton raises any objection, just pitch him off the tower."

And the sexton raised no objection, whether because he did not want to be pitched off the tower, or because he was a Republican at heart; and the great scene was enacted when—the tricolour now visible to all the town—Dumas stalked into the office of the Vicomte de Linières, commandant of Soissons, and presented the order of General Gerard, whom he falsely described as War Minister, that all the gunpowder in the place should be handed over to him, the commandant being attended by three other officers.

He did not look in the least like a man to whom a general would have given such a commission. He was dressed, not as a soldier, but as a sportsman. The dust of travel covered him. He had been too busy fighting to have time to wash his face, or shave, or change his shirt for several days. His coat had lost half its buttons. He had not troubled to attend to his toilet—though one supposes that he might very well have done so—while accepting Mme Hutin's hospitality. And in that garb and condition—his hair frizzled and his face dusky—he presented himself to these four officers, spick and span in their uniforms, and explained his errand.

They smiled ironically. He was for them, they made it clear, not the great dramatic author whose name was a household word, but merely "a M. Dumas." They enquired whether he had brought an army to enforce

the execution of the order in case they refused to obey it, and how, as he was alone, and there were four of them, he did propose to enforce its execution. The narrative proceeds.

"The commandant's tone of raillery, and his way of expressing himself, had already made it clear to me that things were getting warm. I had, therefore, gradually stepped back towards the door, and, while stepping back, I had thrust my hands into my coat pocket and silently cocked my pistols.

"With a sudden movement I pulled them out of my pocket and pointed them at the men before me. Then, stepping forward a pace or two:

" 'Gentlemen,' I said to them, 'I give you my word of honour that, if your order to hand me over the powder is not signed in five seconds, I shall blow out the brains of every one of you, and I shall begin with you, M. le Commandant. . . *A tout seigneur, tout honneur.*'

"I was very pale, but I don't doubt that, in spite of my pallor, my face expressed immutable resolution.

"The two barrels of the pistol which I held in my right hand were only eighteen inches away from M. de Linières' face.

" 'Take care, sir,' I said. 'I am going to count the seconds.'

"Then after a pause:

" 'One, two, three. . .

"At that moment, a side door opened and a woman, in a paroxysm of terror, burst into the room.

" 'Give in, dear, give in,' she cried. 'This is a negro revolt'."

She was the commandant's wife. Her parents had

been murdered, before her eyes, in the negro revolt at San Domingo, and Dumas' black face frightened her. She took him for a negro, at the head of another negro band, resolved upon another massacre. Her husband yielded to her panic-stricken entreaties and let Dumas have his way about the powder.

It is a story which one would like to believe, because it is worth believing; but one cannot. It strains credulity too far. Dumas, though dusky and frizzled, was by no means black enough to be mistaken for a San Domingan negro. He had no negro—or even negroid—companions; and there were plenty of white men in Soissons, as the good lady knew perfectly well, able and willing to make short work of any negroes who made themselves obstreperous there. One may admire his audacious humour in representing his bold coup as a feat which redounded to the greater glory of the Africa of his origin; but one knows perfectly well that it did not, and that the only reason why his bluff was not called was that the officers at Soissons could not trust their men and feared the hostility of the civil population.

And Dumas knew that too, though he chose to forget it when telling his story. Subaltern officers, as he admits, had given him whispered assurances of the neutrality of the soldiers; and the attitude of the civilians is sufficiently attested by the fact that the Soissons fire brigade turned out *en masse* to escort him and his powder cart for some distance along the road to Paris.

But the feat was, none the less, a memorable one. Dumas returned to Paris, bringing his powder with him, whereas a less audacious man, if he had not been shot, would almost certainly have returned without it. The

compliment which the Duc d'Orléans, now on the point of becoming Louis-Philippe, King of the French, paid him—"Bravo, M. Dumas. This is the very best of your dramas"—was justified.

Somehow or other he had persuaded four French officers to do his bidding. Somehow or other the four French officers had found a means of saving their faces while surrendering. But not, we may be quite sure, in the precise manner which Dumas relates. Four officers would be no more likely in France than in England to take orders from a travel-stained quadroon, attired as a highwayman. That sort of thing may happen on the stage or the screen, but not in real life. Real officers in real armies do not behave like that. They take risks and show fight; and as these officers did not show fight, we can only conclude that distance lent its magic enchantment to Dumas' view of those achievements of his youth which it delighted him to recall in middle age.

Meanwhile the Revolution continued; but there is little more to be said about the part which Dumas played in it.

It seemed to him a disappointing revolution. Being a Republican, in so far as he had any political opinions at all, he saw no reason for calling in a new king. He was the less able to see any reason for doing so because he had never liked the Duc d'Orléans; and his rancour did not diminish with the lapse of time. At the date at which he sat down to write his Memoirs, he recalled, not only that the Duc d'Orléans had paid him too small a salary to please him and discouraged his first literary efforts, but also that King Louis-Philippe had snubbed him when he considered himself a person of importance

in circumstances of which mention will presently have to be made.

Perhaps he was a person whom it was difficult for either the Duc d'Orléans or King Louis-Philippe to avoid snubbing; for the stories which he tells us—and which others tell us—of his relations with social superiors constantly suggest the *parvenu* with an inferiority complex trying to protect himself by self-assertion and aggressiveness; and kings cannot be expected to put up with that. But he had been snubbed, and had resented the snubs; and he consequently held up to ridicule and contempt the monarch whom he had helped up the steps of the throne, declaring that he begged for a crown in order that he might not lose his fortune, and professing to pity him because, in order to acquire it, he had been obliged to sing the "Marseillaise" at the Tuileries in a false and quavering voice and to give the accolade to Republican supporters so unkempt and filthy that he always felt the need of running to his bedroom and washing his face after doing so.

Apparently, too, there was another grievance. Dumas considered, as we gather from his Memoirs, that his services to the cause ought to have been rewarded with an Embassy—that he, rather than Talleyrand, should have been commissioned to represent the new King at the Court of Saint James's. But he aspired to that honour in vain, and received only a very minor honour in place of it—a commission, given to him by Lafayette, to see if he could organise a Royalist National Guard in La Vendée, and leave to wear any uniform which he liked to design for himself while organising it.

CHAPTER IX

THE colour of the uniform which Dumas decided upon for his expedition was sky blue, set off by a silver belt and silver epaulettes. Tricolour plumes waved in the cocked hat which adorned his frizzled head. He tells us that it was much admired in Paris, but that the Vendéens regarded his wearing of it in their country as a provocative gesture of contempt, and would have potted at him from behind their hedges if he had not had as his guide a local criminal whom his influence and protection had saved from a long term of imprisonment for circulating forged bank notes.

And that may be true. The fact that such a target as he presented was not potted at from behind a Vendean hedge does need to be explained; and that explanation seems as plausible as any other.

The fear of the hedges, at any rate, was the beginning —and also the end—of such wisdom as there was in his report on his mission. He said nothing, or next to nothing, in it about the possibility, or impossibility, of organising a Vendean National Guard, but merely suggested that the narrow lanes, bordered by hedges, should be replaced by broad highways without hedges, so that miscreants might in the future have fewer opportunities of taking pot shots at honest men.

It may be, of course—he hints as much—that he had accepted the mission, instead of the desired Embassy,

merely because it gave him an opportunity of taking a holiday in a gaudy uniform at the public cost. It is equally likely that Lafayette gave him the mission merely for the purpose of getting a boisterous and importunate supporter temporarily out of the way. But Louis-Philippe, now securely seated on his throne, was dissatisfied, and sent for him; and his account of the interview gives us another glimpse at that arrogance in the presence of the great ones of the earth on which he prided himself as one of the distinguishing characteristics of his genius.

Louis-Philippe wanted, he told his friends, to "have a talk" with him. The hour fixed for the audience was eight o'clock in the morning; and the King would find him unpleasant because he was "always in a bad temper at that absurdly early hour." But he would go, and would give the King good advice, speaking to him "as man to man."

And so, according to his own account, he did. Or rather, according to his own account, he did more than that and spoke to his sovereign almost as a headmaster speaks to a delinquent brought before him, charged with a misdemeanour. He lectured his sovereign, if we may believe him, not only on the topography of La Vendée and the sentiments of its inhabitants, but also on his own policy. He told him that the waging of a war for the deliverance of oppressed peoples—the Belgians, the Italians or the Poles—was the duty which lay nearest to him, but that he seemed to be afraid of such a war, and to be exaggerating the possibility of troubles in La Vendée as an excuse for avoiding the course which duty and chivalry dictated. And then—so his story goes:

"The King bit his lips. I could see that I had touched him on the raw.

" 'M. Dumas,' he said, 'politics are a sorry trade. Leave them to kings and their ministers. You are a poet. Go away and get on with your poetry.'

" 'You mean to say. . .'

" 'Merely that, being a poet, you see the poetical side of things.'

"I bowed.

" 'Sire,' I said, 'the ancients used to call the poets seers.' "

Whereupon the King signified that the poet might withdraw; and Dumas withdrew—walking backwards, he assures us, in accordance with those prescriptions of etiquette which Louis-Philippe had himself impressed upon him when presenting him to Charles X—and, having withdrawn, wrote this letter:

"SIRE:

"My political opinions not being in harmony with those which Your Majesty has the right to exact from members of his household, I beg Your Majesty to accept my resignation of the post of librarian.

"I have the honour to be, with respect, etc.,

"ALEXANDRE DUMAS."

It is a story in which he has the *beau rôle*—naturally as he was distributing the parts himself; and, however much it may have been embroidered, it is a fitting prelude to another story, told further on in the Memoirs, of the incident which completed the breach between the Republican man of letters and his King.

Dumas, it is evident, in spite of his picture of himself admonishing his King on his lack of spirit and putting him in his proper place, had not been unconscious of the snub administered when he was complimented as a poet and told to go away to get on with his poetry. He resented it, and instead of getting on with his poetry, he got on with his Republicanism, enlisting in the artillery of the National Guard—a branch of the National Guard notorious for its Republican sympathies. He made himself popular in his company, and was presently promoted to be its captain.

And then a strange thing happened.

Artillery with Republican sympathies was not the sort of artillery that the King wanted. He decided to decree the dissolution of the artillery of the National Guard. The decree dissolving it, with a view to its reorganization on less democratic lines, appeared in the *Moniteur* on New Year's Day, 1831. The officers of the corps had agreed that they would, on that morning, present themselves at the Tuileries, to pay their respects to the King. Dumas was the only one of them who did so present himself; and he presented himself in the uniform of the regiment which the King had disbanded.

Everybody stared at him; everybody shrank from him, as from a pariah or a leper. There was a smile on every face as he stood, a conspicuous figure, in the royal presence, in the midst of an ever-widening semicircle; and Louise-Philippe smiled too, and said:

"*Boniour, Dumas. Je vous reconnais bien là.*"

Meaning, of course, not merely that he recognized Dumas, but that he considered this audacious impudence quite characteristic of him.

It is a queer story. At no well-conducted Court would an officer wearing the uniform of a disbanded regiment have got past the door-keepers; but it seems to be true, Louis-Philippe being only a citizen king, awkwardly feeling his way to magnificence and dignity; and our only question is: Was the affront deliberate? Was Dumas, so to say, "trying it on," or is it true, as he tells us, that he had made a *bona fide* mistake, not having read the *Moniteur* that day, and not knowing that his gorgeous apparel was the uniform of a regiment which had ceased to exist?

One cannot say, for one can never take Dumas' unsupported word for anything. He would, one feels, have been equally capable of the mistake and of the audacity; and one can only say that this act of audacity, if audacity it was, does not stand alone, but was repeated, with variations, a few years later, when Dumas was admitted to the friendship—the very intimate friendship, as he flattered himself—of Louis-Philippe's son, the new Duc d'Orléans, and thought that he could safely take a liberty.

Courtiers had, indeed, cautioned the Duc d'Orléans, pointing out that a Bohemian like Dumas was not a very desirable associate for a royal prince; but he had ignored their warnings. "What does it matter? The fellow amuses me," he had replied; and when he gave a ball, he sent Dumas an invitation, which Dumas interpreted as an invitation for "self and friend." And the friend whom Dumas brought with him to the ballroom of the heir apparent to the French throne was a notorious actress whom all Paris knew to be his mistress.

And then—there are two versions of the rest of the story.

According to some chroniclers, two polite aides-de-camp accosted the lady, insisted upon showing her the way, and so guided her to a carriage in which they sent her home. According to others, the Duc d'Orléans himself took action, saying to Dumas:

"I am taking it for granted, M. Dumas, that the lady whom you have presented to me is your wife."

The latter version is given in such solemn works of reference as the "Grand Dictionnaire Larousse." It is the less credible version of the two. A Bohemian of letters who brought an uninvited and undesirable actress to a royal party would be no more likely in France than in any other country to be told that he could purge his offence by marrying her. But that does not matter. One cites the story only for the sake of the light which it throws on Dumas' self-assurance, our immediate concern being with the immediate sequel of the incident at the Tuileries.

There is a story—it is not Dumas who tells it—that he went down to Versailles, when Louis-Philippe was there, and threw himself on the ground to apologise for his unintentional but ridiculous breach of etiquette, and that the King pulled him by the ear, saying:

"Oh, you big baby!"

It may be a true story, or it may not. It does not fit in very well with the story that Dumas wrote a letter to the King, telling him that "kings and citizens are equal in the eyes of the poet who lifts the shroud from the faces of the dead and the mask from the faces of the living, lashing absurdity and stigmatising crime." But it does fit in with a good many other stories which illustrate Louis-Philippe's obstinate refusal to take the dramatic author

who had once been his clerk as seriously as he took himself; and it certainly looks as though Dumas' failure to persuade serious people to take him seriously was an important factor in his political excitability.

He wanted to be a politician because the King had called him a poet. "The man of letters," he wrote to the King, "is only the preface of the politician"; and he made it quite clear that he would willingly have served Louis-Philippe in an exalted capacity if he had been given the opportunity of doing so. But he made it equally clear that, if Louis-Philippe had no use for Dumas, then Dumas had no use for Louis-Philippe. On that plea issue was joined, and he went definitely into opposition.

And even in opposition he was not taken seriously, in spite of the fact that he made himself conspicuous in a riot—so conspicuous that a Legitimist paper actually circulated the report that he "had been arrested in the course of the street fighting, tried by court martial, and shot."

All that happened to him, even then, was that Louis-Philippe sent an aide-de-camp to give him a friendly hint to leave the country for a time because the question of arresting him was under consideration; and a mild attack of cholera having given him a good excuse for holding that change of air would benefit his health, he packed his traps and set off for Switzerland.

CHAPTER X

THE excursion to Switzerland was mainly a walking tour. Dumas traversed the country with giant's strides, covering incredible distances in incredibly short time, hardly ever stopping anywhere for more than a night, jesting affably with guides, innkeepers and chance acquaintances, delighted beyond measure when a stranger greeted him as a celebrity, admiring sunrises, eating and drinking too much, teaching Swiss cooks to make omelettes, picking up Swiss history and legends.

One can read about it all in his "Impressions de Voyage"—a most delightful supplement to the guide-books, still well worth reading. It anticipates the historical novelist, and reflects the portrait of the man as accurately as a mirror: his naïve and childish vanity, his lively and superficial emotions—as sudden and as transitory as the mountain thunderstorms—his eager interest in everything that happens, and his instinctive habit of dramatising the commonplace. It has more value, from that point of view, than the Memoirs, because the impressions were put on paper while they were fresh.

In the course of his journey he met—or, rather, introduced himself to—three celebrities: Jacques Balmat, the hero of the first ascent of Mont Blanc; Chateaubriand, whose disgust at the Revolution and its consequences had driven him into exile at Lucerne; Queen Hortense, Empress Josephine's daughter, who was living as

Comtesse de Saint-Leu at Arenenberg. He not only met them, but "interviewed" them, after the manner of a journalist, got their "stories," and gave them good advice. The interview with Jacques Balmat is a most graphic and entertaining reproduction of the grotesque lies which Balmat told—but which Dumas had no means of checking—in depreciation of Dr. Paccard, who had shared the honours of the climb, and whom he now declared to have been a drunkard.

Nothing that the two others said to him or that he said to them really matters very much; but it is interesting to see how his report of his conversations with them reflects his rancour at Louis-Philippe's slights and snubs and patronising familiarity.

Chateaubriand and he had really nothing in common, except their objection to Louis-Philippe. The one was a Royalist and the other a Republican; the one a clerical and the other an anticlerical. Their literary ideals also differed almost as widely as two men's literary ideals can. But we find Dumas nevertheless bowing down and worshipping Chateaubriand, professing to feel insignificantly unimportant in his presence, declaring that, though nominally a Royalist, he was a Republican at heart, and reporting, with enthusiasm, his scorn at the spectacle of "one throne in blood and another in the mud, lawyers compiling a charter, and a king shaking hands with scavengers."

He had quite as little in common with Queen Hortense as with Chateaubriand, seeing that she was the sister-in-law of the Emperor who had driven his father into private life and refused his mother a pension. But she was beautiful and she was gracious to him, and she loved

Louis-Philippe no better than he did; so, after she had sung him one of her sentimental songs, he gave her good advice, to be passed on to her son, the future Napoleon III:

"I should counsel him, madam, to get his name struck off the list of exiles, to buy an estate in France, to be elected a member of the Chamber of Deputies, to endeavour, by means of his talent, to obtain the support of a majority, and to use that majority for the purpose of deposing Louis-Philippe, and securing his own election to the throne."

It was, roughly spreaking, what Louis-Napoleon ultimately did; but though Dumas printed his report of the interview in which he had outlined this plan of campaign when he got back to Paris, Louis-Philippe took no notice; another proof of his inability to take seriously the "big baby" who had once been a junior clerk in his estate office. It may be that he was the less inclined to do so because there were signs that Parisian playgoers were getting tired of Dumas.

They were deceptive signs, however. Dumas had his lean period after his return to Switzerland; but it did not last very long. He had his failures, but fresh successes soon redeemed them and enabled him once again to cut the sort of dash that he enjoyed cutting, and he signalised his financial recovery by sending out invitations for a fancy dress ball which was also, in its way, a political demonstration, in the Carnival Week of 1832.

A fancy dress ball had just been given at the Tuileries; but only important people moving in political and official circles had been invited. The arts had been ignored. Why not an arts ball as a defiant gesture proving that

the arts must be reckoned with? Bocage, the actor, suggested the idea. Dumas adopted it. He hired a hall, which his painter friends decorated for him. Everybody who was anybody in the literary and artistic worlds—Alfred and Paul de Musset, Eugène Sue, Delacroix, Boulanger, Rossini, Bocage, Mlles George and Mars—came to the dance; and there was also a sprinkling of serious people—Odilon Barrot, and Buloz of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and General Lafayette.

Dumas poured out the champagne and kissed the girls. For hostess he had Ida Ferrier, the actress, who had, just before, been so pleased with a part of hers in a play of his that she had impulsively thrown her arms round his neck, with the result that he had carried her off to supper, and kept her to breakfast, and given her the place in his heart which Bell Krebsamer was vacating. The fun was fast and furious; and the climax came when, at nine oclock in the morning, the dancers, instead of dispersing, finished their dance by daylight on the Boulevard.

It was a most successful revel; but, as a political demonstration, it missed fire. Louis-Philippe took no notice, being quite satisfied that his subjects should enjoy themselves in harmless ways and choose their own society, leaving him free to choose his.

Only one notable name which one would have expected to find in the list of guests was missing from it—that of Victor Hugo.

Perhaps he would have stayed away, even if he had been invited, Bohemian revelry not being much in his line. It was, indeed, at a fancy dress ball that he had picked up Juliette Drouet, taken her away from the

Russian nobleman who had furnished the apartment in which she lived, and established her as his Muse and mistress; but he had, since then, withdrawn from Bohemia, and was now devoting his well-earned leisure to the broadening of his phylacteries.

He was not invited, however. Dumas and he were estranged, and the story of their strained relations belongs both to romantic and to literary history.

They were jealous of each other. Hugo, though the prophet of the Romantic Movement, was, in practice, rather a dull exponent of the dramatic principles which he preached; and dullness was, in Dumas' eyes, the unpardonable literary sin. He found even "Hernani" dull, and he said so. One night, when the curtain fell on a performance of "Hernani," and the applause was rapturous, he whispered to his companion: "Let us make haste and go out for fear they play it again."

Hugo, on his part, was jealous of Dumas' popularity, but did not see how to achieve an equal popularity except by imitating him. He wrote "Marie Tudor," and feared that he would be told, as, in fact, he promptly was told, that, "Marie Tudor" owed any merit that it had to his imitation of Dumas' "Christine." In accordance with the military principle that the most effective defence is a counter attack, he inspired an article in the *Journal des Débats*, published a few days before the production of "Marie Tudor," in which Dumas himself was derided as a plagiarist who had enriched himself by plundering Goethe, Schiller, Walter Scott and Lope de Vega.

Perhaps he had. Plagiarism was never, in his eyes, one of the deadly sins. He held that any man was entitled to steal any story, provided that he left it better than he

found it. But it hardly became the rival who was pilfering from him to pillory him for his thefts; and estrangement resulted—estrangement the more complete because the lady who had found favour in Victor Hugo's eyes failed so lamentably in her part that it was taken away from her and given to Dumas' friend, the Mlle Ida Ferrier already mentioned.

It was a literary quarrel which stirred literary Paris to its depths. Hugo's most devoted friends could not defend him. The faithful Sainte-Beuve could think of nothing to say except that the disputes of the poets threatened to bring poetry into contempt. Alfred de Vigny, who was also jealous of Hugo, accused him of "setting his dog at a rival whose celebrity incommoded him." He himself put forward two separate, irreconcilable excuses: the first that he had edited the article and struck many offensive expressions out of it; the second that he had tried to get it suppressed, but that his benevolent intentions had been defeated by the shocking carelessness of a sub-editor. As for Dumas, he summed the matter up with the remark:

"You may say what you like. The fact remains that, when the Théâtre Français found itself in difficulties, it said to me, 'Come and save us,' and to him, 'Save yourself and clear out.' "

And that was, roughly speaking, true. Hugo, as a dramatist, was, on the whole, a failure. His plays were talked about, but did not draw. If it would be an exaggeration to speak of the success of his "Hernani" as the Austerlitz of the Romantic Movement on the stage, it would be no exaggeration to speak of the failure of his "Les Burgraves" as its Waterloo. Dumas, in spite of

occasional failures, was, on the whole, a success, having that "don du théâtre" which Hugo lacked. He was, in the end, to be pushed out of favour by Scribe and his "well made play"; but, in the meantime, managers were convinced that there was, or might be, "money in Dumas," but that it was extremely unlikely that there ever would be money in Victor Hugo.

Thiers, for that reason, when Minister, besought Dumas to bring the Comédie Française another play. He agreed to do so on condition that the national theatre should first revive "Antony," with Marie Dorval in the leading part. His terms were agreed to, and "Antony" was put in rehearsal; and when it was withdrawn, at the eleventh hour, because a number of deputies had threatened to vote against the subsidy of the national theatre if that sensational and immoral piece were staged there, he sued the theatre and was awarded £400 damages.

That, naturally, was the end of his connection with the national theatre. His connection with other theatres continued, with interruptions, until the end of his life; but the theatre was no longer the sole source, and was presently to cease to be the main source, of his literary income. He very nearly, at this stage, became a literary hack, rewriting history—transforming accurate dull history into inaccurate popular history—and turning out books of travel which, but for the occasional personal touches which gave them vivacity, might not unfairly be described as "glorified guide-books."

Buloz, of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, took him up. In later years he distinguished between two literary "genres": the "genre ennuyeux," which Buloz liked and printed, and the "genre amusant," of which he was him-

self the exponent; but it cannot be denied that there were samples of both "genres"—and rather more of the former than of the latter—in his own contributions to Buloz' periodical, though it was the historical reading—the "mugging up," so to say, required for the production of his "glorified guide-books,"—which equipped him for his second career as the most brilliant of all exponents of the romance of history.

That he was consciously equipping himself for it is unlikely. It was only in early life that he took long views, fixing his eyes on the future because the present was dull. When the present became interesting he was content to live in the present, leaving the development of his genius to the chance occurrence of some happy thought —a literary Micawber, always waiting for something to turn up; but he differed from Micawber in the fact that when something did turn up he put his back into his work.

There was more originality, perhaps, in his method than in his ideas. His art was, in the main, the great art of making dry bones live. At first he discovered dry bones by accident. Presently other men who had also discovered dry bones but had failed to make them live took to bringing them to him and asking him to see what he could do with them. That is the story, in a nutshell, of his numerous collaborations as a dramatic author. Whether it is also the true story of his relations with his collaborators as a novelist is another question.

He was, before everything else, at this period, a live man, an interesting man, and an amusing man, with a genius for repartee, deadly, though seldom intentionally malicious. Hugo once accused him of having

"violated" Queen Christine in his play. "If I violated her," he retorted, "at any rate I gave her a child." Balzac once told him that, when he was played out as a novelist, he should take to writing for the stage, and his rejoinder was: "In that case you had better lose no time, but begin at once."

Exact details about his financial position cannot be given. He tells us, in his account of his Swiss travels, that he was then making about £1,200 a year. Whether he made more or less than that after his return from Switzerland is uncertain. No doubt his income, like that of other dramatic authors, varied; but he seems to have been prosperous, without being exceptionally rich, never saving money, but always doing himself well, sometimes at his own and sometimes at his creditors' expense. The familiar story that, when someone asked him to subscribe fifty francs towards the funeral expenses of a bailiff, he offered one hundred francs in order that two bailiffs might be safely interred, belongs to these years.

His life, as ever, in spite of his friendship with the Duc d'Orléans and his acquaintance with many notable social figures, was that of a Bohemian who, when not sitting at his desk, "making copy for Buloz," or rushing about Europe gathering material for that copy, made himself conspicuous in cafés. One may fairly call him the most conspicuous Bohemian of his time; and the reasons why he was so conspicuous are obvious.

He was a very big man; he was a very jovial man. He had that gaudy taste in dress to which men of African origin are ordinarily disposed, sometimes dressing like a dandy in the height of the fashion, and sometimes, on

his return from a journey, attired in the dark sombrero and highly coloured trappings of a Corsican bandit. When decorations were bestowed on him—and he picked up a good many minor but glittering decorations in the course of his travels—he delighted to display what an American ambassador, when speaking of a distinguished German's decorations, called "the whole menagerie" on the broad acres of his chest.

And he enjoyed being conspicuous. There never was a man who less resented being stared at. He not only played to the gallery, but felt the constant need of a gallery to play to. He knew that he could talk amusingly, and therefore talked to amuse, and suffered fools gladly if only they kept quiet and let him talk. "I should have found the party very dull," he once said of some gathering which he had attended, "if I myself had not been there."

Even his dusky complexion and his fuzzy-wuzzy hair, which another quadroon might have found social drawbacks, for him were social assets to be exploited. We have already seen him boasting of the terror which his dark ferocity inspired in the bosom of the wife of the commandant at Soissons. We now see him proposing the erection of a monument to his heroic mulatto father —a statue to be paid for by the loyal inhabitants of Haiti with subscriptions limited to one franc per head; and though the Haitians did not come forward with subscriptions in sufficient numbers to give practical effect to the proposal, one cannot help being impressed by this renewal of the implied boast that the House of Dumas had always worked for the greater glory of Africa.

"He dresses fantastically. He wears gaudy waistcoats, festooned with gold chains. He dines like Sardanapalus. When he drives, he kills his horses, and he is very fond of women."

That is a contemporary journalist's thumbnail sketch of him. It pictures a manner of life bound, in the end, to result in the coarsening of his features and the ungainly extension of his girth. A comparison of portraits of him, painted at various ages, makes it clear that he lost his good looks when his eyes swelled out with fatness; but he was good-looking to begin with, in spite of his thick lips and distinctly African appearance. Women were almost as fond of him as he was of them; and though he and they may not have loved each other in the full sense of the word he never had any lack of mistresses.

Georges Sand, at one time, proposed herself as his mistress. When she quarrelled with Jules Sandeau, she wanted a new lover, and asked Sainte-Beuve to find her one; and when Sainte-Beuve suggested Alfred de Musset who, as all the world knows, succeeded to the vacant office, she objected that he was "too much of a dandy" to suit her, and added:

"Instead of him I should like you to bring Dumas, in whose art I find soul as well as talent. He has said that he would like to meet me—you have only to give him my message."

But nothing came of that. Dumas had already found a "dear friend" in Ida Ferrier—the lady who threw herself into his arms because she was pleased with her part in one of his plays, and subsequently ruled, though not without rivals, as *maîtresse en titre*, until he married her.

It may or may not be true that he married her because the Duc d'Orléans told him to, in circumstances already related. There is another story to the effect that Ida had a guardian—a rich man—who wished to see her safely settled in life, and that this guardian bought, for £1,600, bills to the nominal value of £8,000 which Dumas had accepted, but could not meet, and threatened him with imprisonment for debt if he did not marry her. On the whole, the balance of probability favours the latter story.

Little is known of Ida Ferrier except that she was beautiful and plump, had particularly beautiful hands, and excelled in the stately rôle of an aristocratic duenna. Théophile Gautier, in a laudatory article which he wrote about her, tells us that, but tells us little else. Her majestic presence, he said, suggested calm and dignity; but he insists, in courteous and even eulogistic terms, upon the plumpness:

"Mlle Ida possesses in luxury and excess that which half the women in Paris do not possess at all; so that those of them who are too thin insist that she is too fat and that only her face and head can be admired. I admit, however, at the risk of being taken for a Turk, that a healthy superabundance of contour seems to me a charming fault in a woman. Every woman's figure, as Victor Hugo reminds us, contains a skeleton; but I prefer the skeleton to be as amply enveloped as possible."

Perhaps Dumas agreed with him. Most Africans do. There is, at any rate, no proof that Ida Ferrier's attraction for him rested upon either a moral or an intellectual basis, or that the ultimate waning of his affection for

her was attributable to the inordinate expansion of her figure.

He was, for a time, her devoted slave. He took her about with him on his travels. He intrigued at the theatres to procure suitable parts for her. He intrigued at the newspaper offices to get her the sort of "notices" that she liked. But his devotion did not receive the reward which it deserved; and his patience was worn out by her extravagance, her violent temper and her infidelities. The allegation that she used to beat him is not, indeed, very credible, for a fat woman does not easily beat a man of his Herculean strength; but their marriage —whether because it was a marriage forced upon Dumas and he resented the compulsion, or for some other reason—marked the beginning of the end of their mutual affection.

The two witnesses present at his marriage were Chateaubriand and Roger de Beauvoir—the latter a wealthy aristocrat who delighted to spend his time and squander his substance in Bohemian society; and the day came when he discovered that Roger de Beauvoir was his rival.

He and his wife were, at that time, occupying separate apartments in the same house in the rue de Rivoli; she queening it in a luxurious flat on the first floor and he occasionally visiting her, but spending most of his time—his nights as well as his days—in the simply furnished study on the fourth floor, in which he worked.

Returning one night from a ball to which she had not accompanied him, tired and wet through, he decided to drop in and do a little writing in her more comfortable quarters. He found her in bed and unpleasantly surprised

to see him; but he nevertheless sat down at a table and began to write. Presently he heard the dressing-room door open and, looking up, saw Roger de Beauvoir issuing forth from it in his night shirt.

Naturally, hot words were exchanged. Naturally, Roger de Beauvoir's explanation that it was so cold in the dressing-room that he really could not stay there any longer struck Dumas as inadequate. Nothing would have been more natural than for Dumas to pick up the intruder and pitch him out of the window—a thing which he was quite strong enough to do. But he refrained, presumably because—one can think of no other reason—he had given his wife quite as many grounds of complaint as she had given him.

He even did more than refrain. Observing that it was such weather that one would hardly like to turn a dog into the street, he undressed, and got into bed, and invited Roger de Beauvoir to spend the night in the arm-chair.

Nor was even that the limit of his indulgence. He noticed presently that the fire had gone out and that Roger de Beauvoir was shivering, so he called to him to come to bed too, and the three of them, lying side by side, slept the sleep of innocence until the morning, and then, while Ida was still asleep, he stretched his hand across her to take Roger's hand and said:

"Roger, you and I are too old friends to quarrel about a woman, even if she is the wife of one of us. Let us make it up."

Or so the story goes; and it is the sort of story which, whether true or only well invented, shows the sort of man that Dumas really was.

Whether he also made it up with Ida—whether he even quarrelled with her over the incident—is uncertain. If he did not quarrel with her over it, the only imaginable explanation is that he was already tired of her. In any case the inevitable separation was arranged very soon afterwards. He promised her an allowance of two hundred and forty pounds a year, though it is uncertain whether he paid it. She retired from the stage and went to live in Italy, where she died in 1859; and he, in the meantime, not only paid his addresses to other women, but also made himself a new reputation.

CHAPTER XI

CAN it be true, one wonders, that Dumas once contemplated abandoning literature for the priesthood and pictured himself as the founder of a new Order of Preachers? Probably it is not true; but the story is told.

Two priests from the provinces once encountered him, it is said, in the Luxemburg Garden, and got into conversation with him. He told them who he was, and expressed a wish to consult them on a question of conscience. The glory which he had won as a dramatic author was, he said, nothing to him. He wished to find other scope for his talents in a new career. How would it be if he took Holy Orders? Would his marriage—he was so little married at that time—be an insuperable obstacle? Would it be absolutely necessary for him to submit to discipline in a seminary?

And the end of the story is that, when the worthy curés had answered both questions in the affirmative, he gave them tickets for the theatre and dismissed them.

It is, at any rate, the sort of story that he delighted in telling about himself. Not only has it the saving grace of humour, it also reflects the miscellaneous megalomania of the narrator; and it is placed at a period of his career at which he really felt the need of making himself a new reputation but did not quite know how to make it.

His renown as a playwright was somewhat on the

wane. He had suffered several successive failures. He did not yet know that he was to achieve renown as a novelist; and one can easily picture him seeing himself, if only for the moment, astonishing the world from the pulpit, and in the end, cutting a noble figure in the gorgeous apparel of a highly placed ecclesiastic. He had, too, as many passages in the Memoirs prove, his hours of religiosity, though he never let these interfere with the cake walk, which he would have been quite capable of continuing in the black robe of a Dominican, the red hat of a cardinal, or even the triple tiara of a pope.

But that was not to be. He was on the eve of winning, in other ways, that second reputation after which he hankered, and to make, as a novelist, a success far surpassing that which he had made as a dramatist; and that success was to be the outcome of a happy accident—the result of a friendship struck up with a young man who came to him with an introduction from one of his dramatic collaborators, Gerard de Nerval.

The young man was Auguste Maquet, a schoolmaster and a student of history with literary ambitions, who had written a play. Dumas was persuaded to rewrite his play for him, and it was produced at the Renaissance.

That was in 1838. In 1840 Maquet wrote a novel and showed it to Dumas, who bought it from him for forty-eight pounds, gave it a new title—"Le Chevalier d'Harmantal"—and published it under his own signature. In 1841 he wrote another novel—"Sylvandire"—and Dumas bought this too and gave it to the world, without substantial alteration, as his own.

Both novels were successful. The former was very

successful—far more successful than any of the six novels, all of them now forgotten, which Dumas had previously written. It was clear to him that he had, with his collaborator's help, struck a new vein which, properly worked, might be expected to enrich him. The effective working of it began with the production of "The Three Musketeers," concerning which Maquet wrote to his friend, Paul Lacroix:

"We wrote 'The Three Musketeers' together. The first volumes were written by me without any collaboration from the first volume of the 'Memoirs of d'Artagnan.'"

And a list which Maquet made of his manuscripts contains this note in his handwriting:

"Manuscript of the end of 'The Musketeers.' My first work, *mine alone*."

Quite a number of novels—at least a dozen—either written in collaboration with Maquet or written by Maquet and signed by Dumas followed. They include "Joseph Balsamo," "Monte Cristo," "La Reine Margot," and several other famous romances; and as the collaborators eventually quarrelled, and took their quarrels to the law courts, there was a heated controversy which compels the biographer to face the questions: Was Dumas an impostor? Did he treat Maquet badly? Which of the two collaborators was the more indebted to the other?

The last question is commonly waived aside with the comment that, as Dumas is remembered and Maquet is forgotten, and as the novels which Maquet wrote and signed after his quarrel with Dumas had no success comparable with that of those which he wrote in association with Dumas, it must have been Maquet who supplied the

dry bones and Dumas who made the dry bones live. But that will not do. If it is true that Maquet wrote nothing memorable without the held of Dumas, it is equally true that the novels which keep Dumas' fame alive were those which he wrote with the help of Maquet, and that those which he wrote before he met Maquet and after he had parted from him would never have given him either immediate popularity or posthumous renown.

Theirs was, from the reader's point of view, an ideal collaboration. So long as the work was done, it did not matter to the reader which of the collaborators did the lion's share of the work. At the most he felt some curiosity about the mechanism of the collaboration; and that curiosity can now be gratified.

Maquet devised the stories and wrote them. Dumas copied out what he had written, adding, modifying and paraphrasing, and occasionally suggesting incidents or developments for future chapters. All the novels were written from hand to mouth as serials for newspapers whose editors were clamouring for copy. Both collaborators worked as hard as they could; and the rate of production was so rapid that sixty volumes were once produced in a single year, and several novels were always simultaneously in hand.

It was prodigious. It established a record which, perhaps, even Mr. Edgar Wallace has not yet beaten. It provoked both incredulity and indignation. Nothing was actually known, at that date, of the partnership with Maquet; but the envious nevertheless accused Dumas of committing a fraud on the public, declaring that the work which he signed was not his but that of a syndicate. The charge was formulated in Eugène de Mire-

court's vitriolic pamphlet: *Fabrique de Romans: Maison Dumas et Compagnie.*

This Eugène de Mirecourt, whose real name was Jacquot, was unquestionably a malicious scandalmonger. It was his practice to offer men of letters their choice between being slandered and paying blackmail. Several of them prosecuted him: and he was imprisoned several times for libel before he repented and retired to a monastery to become a holy man. Dumas was one of those who got him sent to prison; but his attack on Dumas, though inaccurate in some of its details, was unquestionably based upon fact.

Maquet was not Dumas' only collaborator. Seven others are mentioned in the bibliographies: Paul Meurice, Paul Lacroix, Hippolyte Auger, Mallefille, Bocage the actor, and the Marquis de Cherville; but Maquet was the only one who really counted. Whatever may have been the case with the others, it cannot be maintained that, in his case, Dumas performed the alchemist's task of transmuting base metal into precious gold. He may have refined the gold; but it was gold that Maquet supplied. The fact that the Dumas masterpieces were the Maquet-Dumas books is only one proof of that. We can find others by comparing the printed text of the novels with the manuscripts which Maquet preserved, and in a number of Dumas' letters to him which Gustave Simon has printed in his "Histoire d'une Collaboration":

> "I want copy as soon as possible, even if it is only ten pages. Above all, I want the first d'Artagnan volume."
>
> "You have left me two whole days without copy.

Consequently for two whole days you have made me the most miserable of men."

"Your packet of manuscript has got lost. It is disgraceful. . . Write it out again, my friend. My man will spend the night in Paris, if necessary, in order to be able to bring me the two packets at once. Send a messenger to the *Dêbats* to tell the editor that the manuscript has been lost and that I am obliged to rewrite it."

"It is all your fault, my friend, that we don't make faster progress. I have been sitting, waiting for you, with folded arms, since nine o'clock."

"It is absolutely necessary for us to get 'La Reine Margot' finished by the first of next month. Let us get back to work at it. I return you your last pages so that you may be able to begin where you left off."

There are dozens of notes of the kind. In one of them we find Dumas instructing Maquet to write on a particular kind of paper—his own—in order to mislead an editor into the belief that his work has merely been that of a copying clerk, and we find this pencil note, in Maquet's handwriting, in the margin:

"It often happened that Maquet did all the work alone and sent it straight to the press."

Maquet seems, for quite a while, to have been fairly well satisfied with the arrangement. He was young and he was modest. He enjoyed seeing himself in print, and he wanted ready money. He was surer of Dumas's reputation than of his own talent. Dumas was Somebody

and he was Nobody. Dumas was genial and made much of him. The fraud on the public was no business of his. The responsibility for that was Dumas'. It suited him, therefore, to make his literary début as Dumas' satellite.

By degrees, however, his eyes were opened. No doubt Eugène de Mirecourt's scurrilous pamphlet did a good deal to open them. He acquired a gradually increasing sense of his own value and a keen desire both for fame and for more money. Was he not, he began to ask himself, doing quite as much for Dumas as Dumas was doing for him? Was he not, perhaps, doing more? Was it reasonable that Dumas should get all the credit while he was doing most of the work? Ought not he, as well as Dumas, to sign the books? Ought he not to have an equal share of the profits instead of the mere pittance gradually raised from eight pounds to twenty pounds a volume which Dumas paid him while himself pocketing an income beyond the dreams of his collaborator's avarice if not of his own?

He may have asked himself these questions the more emphatically because his pittance was paid very irregularly, and sometimes was not paid at all.

Not that Dumas was ever consciously stingy or deliberately dishonest. He was merely a man who, in the disposition of his money, pursued the line of least resistance, and when he had given a written promise to pay a debt regarded the debt as paid and thought no more about it, being too generous to the undeserving to be just to the deserving.

The cake walk was expensive, and its claims came first. Mendicant parasites beleagured him, and their claims came next—he pointed to the bowl of money on the

mantelpiece and told them to help themselves. He had insistent creditors who served writs and threatened to put in the bailiffs, and their claims came third. Little or nothing was left over, when these were satisfied, for the satisfaction of such a creditor as Maquet, who, being a gentleman and a hero-worshipper, felt some delicacy in dunning an eminent man of letters who was also a personal friend and a patron; and so it came about that Dumas sometimes, instead of paying him, borrowed from him, as when he wrote:

"My dear Friend:

"I owe you, if I am not mistaken, 240 francs for money lent, in addition to your literary account. Can you send me another 260 francs? Then I shall owe you 500 francs in all.

"Yours,

"A. Dumas."

That sort of thing could not continue without impairing friendship. It did continue, and friendship was impaired, even to the point of litigation. The story of the disputes is long and intricate; but a brief summary of it must be attempted.

The Mirecourt pamphlet extorted from Dumas the open admission, contained in a letter addressed to the Committee of the Société des Gens de Lettres and repeated in his Memoirs, that Maquet had been his collaborator. In order to protect himself from any claim to a share in his royalties which might be based on that admission by Maquet or his heirs, executors, administrators or assigns, he entered into an agreement with

Maquet for the surrender of all his rights in consideration, not of a cash payment, but of a promise to pay; and he failed to carry out his promise.

He had been appointed "moral and artistic director" of a new theatre—the Théâtre historique, of which more presently. He undertook to pay Maquet, from the profits of that post, in settlement of his claims, forty-four pounds a month for a term of eleven years; and he further undertook to produce annually at the theatre three plays which he and Maquet were to write and sign.

All ought to have been plain sailing after that; but it was not.

The agreement between the two authors was signed in 1848. The times were unfavourable to theatrical enterprise and the Théâtre historique did not flourish. It foundered in bankruptcy in 1851, and Maquet's security for the promised payments disappeared; but Dumas had not waited for that disaster in order to evade his obligations. He had evaded them from the first, neglecting to pay Maquet his dues and leaving him to do all the work in which they were nominally partners while he himself engaged in other work, aided by other collaborators of inferior merit with whom he could make better terms. And that in spite of a letter in which he assured him that he regarded "collaboration with anyone but you as an adultery."

How completely both Dumas and the editors trusted him to do the work which Dumas signed is attested by letters from editors who appealed, not to Dumas, but to him when copy which had been promised failed to arrive. "I shall never fail," one of them wrote to him, "to be grateful for the service you have rendered me in finish-

ing 'Le Vicomte de Bragelonne.'" How completely Dumas ignored his financial obligations is proved by a bitter letter in which Maquet reminded him of them: "I never get the money for my work. You are leaving me in a state of great embarrassment, though you really ought to pay me before you pay anybody else."

And yet when Dumas complained pathetically of his own financial troubles, Maquet was moved to pity and wrote:

> "My dear friend, I have neither money nor credit. Both have been exhausted during the three months in which I have received no payment and business has been so bad. But I have a pen and I have a heart. Set me to work, and make money out of my work for both of us."

It had become necessary, however, for Maquet to do work of his own in order to earn money for himself. He and Dumas thereafter went their separate ways; and the critics who, dazzled by the glamour of a great name, depreciate Maquet as a mere craftsman while they exalt Dumas as a genius, may usefully be reminded that Maquet's prosperity—and he became quite prosperous—dates from his separation from Dumas, and that it was when he separated from Maquet that Dumas entered upon the period of his decline and fall.

Perhaps Maquet lacked personality. He certainly had not a fraction of Dumas' skill in the art of self-advertisement, or of Dumas' vanity—the vanity of the man who, as his own son said, was so vain that he could picture him riding on the footman's seat in his own

carriage in order to give the world the impression that he had a negro in his service. The books, therefore, of which he wrote the major part—*cui magna pars fuit*, as Dumas wrote of them in his grotesque dog Latin—may have owed their instantaneously triumphant success to their association with the name of an author who loved asserting himself, who could not move without attracting attention, and whose every movement suggested a cake walk gesture. But he was a writer of great talent—perhaps of genius; and it is very doubtful whether Dumas would ever, without his help, have made the abiding mark which he did make in French literature.

It must be added that there was a time when Dumas could have paid him at least a substantial instalment of his debt, and that that opportunity was not taken.

In 1856 Dumas won a law suit against a publisher, and was awarded and paid £9,000 damages. Maquet then wrote, reminding him of the obligation and suggesting a payment on account. Dumas did not answer the letter. That was the origin of the litigation; but unfortunately Dumas had spent the money before the case came on for hearing, and Maquet never received a farthing.

Yet—such is the irony of life—Maquet, whom Dumas had exploited, was to die rich, whereas Dumas, who had exploited him, was, as we shall see, to die destitute.

CHAPTER XII

IT was towards the end of the eighteen-forties that Dumas attained the zenith of his renown and bestrode Paris like a colossus between whose legs lesser men—royal princes among their number—were contented to creep in and out, and Michelet spoke of him as "one of the forces of nature": a true description, seeing that there was much in his manner of life that suggested a flood, an eruption or an earthquake.

Paris accepted him at his own valuation. It is one of the proofs of his genius that he compelled Paris—its men of letters as well as its men in the street—to do so. How shall we picture him? With whom shall we compare him? One might compare him with a dozen men, carefully selected for the purpose; but the portrait would still be imperfect and incomplete. He might be spoken of as a dissolute Sir Walter Scott, a magnified non-natural George Augustus Sala, a literary Baron Grant, a Henri Mürger with a talent for getting on; but these analogies do not carry one very far.

Dumas at his zenith was all these things, but he was a good many other things as well. He combined the genius which is inspiration with the genius which is the power of taking pains. In a sense he combined temperance with excess, since he always took water with his wine, though he squandered his substance on loose women. As we have seen already, he was sometimes a dandy and

sometimes an unkempt Bohemian, but always non-moral and always a megalomaniac. And whatever he was, he was more intensely and violently than other men. He was, in short, such a congeries of exaggerations as only France and the tropics could have produced and only Paris among civilised cities would have tolerated.

Certainly London would not have tolerated him. In London, not only ridicule but the unabashed indecency of his behaviour would have crushed him.

Imagine London bowing down and doing homage to a novelist who dressed himself up in the uniform of a volunteer colonel and appeared in public with his breast covered with decorations, procured heaven knew whence or how, and throwing real generals and even royal princes into the shade by the dazzling glitter of these embellishments! Imagine London Society eagerly accepting invitations to the country house of a novelist who had several mistresses openly living with him there, and who was just as likely as not to sit down to dinner with his guests in shirt sleeves and slippers, with an unbuttoned flannel shirt displaying the contour of his brawny chest!

The thing is, of course, unthinkable. But that is exactly how Dumas behaved, and all Paris paid court to him. First the Duc d'Orléans and then the Duc de Montpensier made a friend of him. A Cabinet Minister sent him to Africa on a propagandist mission. The attitude of the rest of the world is thus described by De Villemessant of the *Figaro*, whose position in Paris resembled that of Edmund Yates when editing the *World*.

"He chose the party he would go to as he would

choose his theatre or his newsaper; and when it was whispered in Paris, 'Dumas is going to such and such a house this evening,' there was always a throng at the door like the crowd at the entrance of the play-house."

He was doing, or gave the impression that he was doing, everything at once: writing four serial stories simultaneously; publishing sixty volumes in a single year; managing a theatre; writing, in collaboration with Maquet, all the plays which that theatre staged; travelling as far afield as Algeria; taking a hand in political agitation; commanding a detachment of the National Guard; offering himself as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies; and, at the same time, entertaining lavishly.

It was, indeed, notorious, thanks to Eugène de Mirecourt, that he did not actually write all the work which he signed. That pamphleteer had made an arithmetical computation:

"You published sixty volumes in 1845. Very well. Now we will do a little simple arithmetic.

"The most skilful copyist, writing twelve hours a day, hardly copies 3,900 letters in an hour. At the end of his day he will have got through 46,800 letters, or sixty pages of the average novel. He will be able to copy five octavo volumes in a month, or sixty in a year, on condition that he never stops for an hour and never loses a second.

"Monsieur Dumas, you are a very meritorious copying clerk.

"From the 1st of January to the 31st of December

you work regularly twelve hours a day, sleeping little and eating in haste. Consequently, on the assumption that your dramatic work, your correspondence with the newspapers and theatres, and your importunate callers only take up a bare half of your time, you have had the time left, not to write, but to copy out, thirty volumes in the course of 1845. All the others must be the work of the men whom you have trained to imitate your handwriting.

"Ah, that I must thus unveil your shame, and destroy even the possibility of doubt!"

Basing himself on that calculation, and drawing the obvious inference from it, an enemy once referred to Dumas offensively in a debate in the Chamber of Deputies as "a well-known contractor for the supply of serial stories—*entrepreneur de feuilletons*"; but he was as little disconcerted by the charge as by the previous charge of plagiarism. His answer to the former charge had been: "The man of genius does not steal, he conquers." His answer to the new one was: "I have my collaborators as Napoleon had his Marshals." If he had lived in our times he would doubtless have boasted of having "rationalised" the literary industry. As it was, he jested, saying, when reproached for some inaccuracy in one of his novels: "I haven't read the book. Let me see. Who wrote it for me? It was that little rascal, Auguste Maquet. I must box his ears."

A chronological account of his proceedings is hardly called for, and would be difficult to compile. Only an anecdotal history of them is possible; but two events stand out as impressive proofs of the spectacular emi-

nence to which he had climbed: the flattering proposals made to him respectively by the Duc de Montpensier and M. de Salvandy, the Minister of Public Instruction.

The former, when "The Three Musketeers" was produced at the Ambigu, summoned Dumas to his box, told him that he ought to have a theatre of his own, and promised, after a short conversation, to pull wires and procure him one—the Théâtre historique, whereat the audience would be able, as Dumas himself puts it, to "read a page of our history every evening." The latter proposed that he should go to Algeria at the public expense and write a glorified guide-book to popularise that newly conquered colony.

He agreed, but made his conditions: that he should be conveyed to the scene of his labours in a ship of war, from Cadiz; and it was further arranged that, on his way through Spain, he should be a guest at Montpensier's forthcoming wedding at Madrid.

The curious may read his own account of the journey. It must have cost him far more than the Government allowance for expenses, for he travelled in style, with a *suite*, taking Maquet to write for him, and Boulanger and Giraud, the artists, to paint for him, and a palmist to tell his fortune, and his son, now a young man in the early twenties, to amuse him, and a negro servant to wait on the party; but the triumphs of the progress well repaid the outlay.

In the inns, indeed, his behaviour, if we may trust his narrative, was that of a mountebank giving a performance; but when he got away from the inns he was acclaimed everywhere as a personage. Because he was Alexandre Dumas, author of "Monte Cristo," customs

house officers let his baggage pass without examining it. Because he was Alexandre Dumas, author of "Monte Cristo," a nobleman sent a carriage to meet him, as he approached Seville, in order that he might "enter the city in a manner worthy of his genius." Because he was Alexandre Dumas, author of "Monte Cristo," a ball and a bull fight were organised in his honour. One misses only——and one is surprised to miss it—some story to the effect that he fell among brigands and that, because he was Alexandre Dumas, author of "Monte Cristo," they drank his health instead of despoiling him.

And so to Algeria and thence back to Paris.

On his arrival in Algeria he was entertained, as a matter of course, by the Governor, Marshal Bugeaud. On his departure from Algeria, the crew of the despatch boat which had taken him there manned the yards in his honour; and when, on his return, certain newspaper proprietors sued him for damages because he had failed to deliver copy which he had contracted to supply, he told the whole story of the honours thus done to him in Court, representing, in mitigation of damages, that he had spent £1,500 of his own money in promoting the greater glory of France. And the Court let him off lightly and left him free to pursue the extravagances of his meteoric course.

Just what his income was at that splendid period it is impossible to ascertain. One knows only that it must have been immense: that editors were willing to pay him as much as £2,000 for a serial story; that publishers paid him rates varying from fourpence to sixpence a line for his books, and that many of his lines consisted only of a single word; that he was also drawing royalties from

several plays, and that, whatever his collaborators were entitled to, they actually got very little. And he had, of course, neither income tax nor super tax to pay, those imposts being the inventions of another country and a later age.

Where the money went can be more easily determined. Most of it went in what the French call *frais de représentation*: the uncounted and unconsidered cost of making a noise in the world and giving it a continuous entertainment.

When he first went to live at Saint-Germain, in a house which he rented at eighty pounds a year, Dumas made so much noise there that Louis-Philippe heard it at Versailles and consulted a member of his household as to the best means of providing him with a brighter Versailles.

"Send for Dumas, Sire," was the reply. "He has been shirking his duty as a national guard. Have him imprisoned at Versailles as a punishment. Then, I promise you, Versailles will be as lively as Saint-Germain."

The advice was not taken; but the noise became louder and the liveliness rose to the *n*th when Dumas built himself a house of his own in the neighbourhood—the famous Villa Monte Cristo in which he attained the zenith of his eminence and perpetrated his most characteristic extravagances.

All that he wanted, to begin with, we are told, was a quiet country cottage in which to work; but he was easily persuaded that no such modest structure would suffice for the requirements of so great a man. The idea grew and grew until the quiet cottage became a country seat which was to know no quietness until the day came

when it was seized for debt. It was to have been the Abbotsford of the French Sir Walter Scott in which Dumas, like his Scottish literary prototype, could live the life of a country gentleman and entertain *en grand seigneur*. But the parallel can be followed no farther. The life at the Villa Monte Cristo was not modelled on the life of Abbotsford, or on any life ever lived by any previous man of letters anywhere. Its nearest precedent is, perhaps, the life lived, for a little while, by Byron at Newstead Abbey; but even that precedent is inadequate. Dumas, in the Villa Monte Cristo, did not follow precedents but set them.

One hardly knows where to begin in attempting a description of the barbaric splendours and the orgies. The whole design seems to have been tropical in its taste and its exaggerations—a weird confusion of Bohemia with the Arabian Nights. In the course of his progress through North Africa, Dumas ransacked the bazaars of Algeria and Tunis for curios and objects of luxury to adorn his dwelling-place. They lay about the house, commingled with costly treasures of home manufacture, in supreme and ornate disorder, giving an air of gorgeous wealth without refinement.

There was every embellishment that the caprices of a luxuriant and undisciplined imagination could suggest: Gothic pavilions, turrets, minarets; an artificial lake with an island and a cascade; a picture gallery, a studio, an aviary, a monkey-house, a stable, a bijou theatre, a kiosk in the garden, with a blue ceiling studded with stars, to serve as a work-room for the master, who had the titles of his principal plays and stories carved conspicuously on the stones of his mansion.

Naturally he did not dwell alone in the mansion—that is not what mansions are for. He dwelt in it as an emperor in a palace, with his retinue—his secretaries, his mistresses, and his parasites who served as courtiers; and the name of these was legion. He had no time, De Villemessant tells us, to distinguish his friends from his acquaintances, but was intimate with everyone whom he knew at all. He had hardly time even to distinguish acquaintances from strangers, but kept open house for all comers—mostly what we now call "gate-crashers." When tradesmen called to present their bills, he invited them to lunch and then sent them away unpaid but pleased with themselves. Any poor devil whom he picked up anywhere and brought home to dinner could quarter himself on him indefinitely and borrow money from him as long as there was money in the house; and many poor devils availed themselves of the opportunity.

There was the poor devil, for instance, who was given the job of looking at the thermometer every day and coming to tell Dumas what the temperature was. There was the poor devil who sold him the skin of a boa constrictor which he alleged to have been shot by General Dumas in Egypt, where there are no boa constrictors, and then settled down in the Villa Monte Cristo for a year or more. There were large numbers of other poor devils who came and went.

And then there were the women.

Women could always plunder Dumas as long as they pleased him. One searches his life in vain, indeed, for any evidence that he ever had a really romantic attachment to any woman; but the pleasures of gallantry were necessary to him—he must have his cake walk. One

might almost say that he was fond of women as some people are fond of children. He liked, at any rate, to have them about him. There were generally several living in his house at the same time, though not always living there in harmony with him or with each other. Every now and again he burst into a volcanic passion and turned one of them out; but turning them out was more expensive than retaining them, for he behaved well, according to his lights, and invited those whom he evicted to take their bedroom furniture with them when they went, leaving their host to refurnish the apartment. The upholsterers' vans were nearly always at the door.

Most of the women about him were actresses—not the least expensive of women. One of the actresses generally undertook the duties of housekeeper—a difficult task in a house in which so much money was given away that there seldom was any left over for the settlement of a bill. The story goes that one of the housekeepers once wrote to him when he was on his travels to say that she had run out of the wine kept for the servants' table and would like to know what he wished her to do about it, and that he replied by return of post: "Better give them the champagne. It will be a pleasant change for them."

It could not last. The wonder is that it lasted as long as it did.

Credit, at first, was abundant. Tradesmen encouraged Dumas to run up long bills, believing him to be as rich as Croesus, and fearing to lose his custom if they asked for their money. Presently, however, when debts accumulated, and no debt was ever voluntarily paid, they took their courage in their two hands and knocked at the door and dunned. Their temper was not improved

by the fact that one of Dumas' faithful servitors used to set booby traps for them, tampering with a plank bridge on which they had to cross a brook in his grounds, with the result that they fell into the water, like the victims of a pirate on the high seas.

Thus incensed, they became more urgent and had sometimes to be allowed to carry away commodities instead of cash. One creditor was persuaded to take away a vulture from the aviary, giving a receipt for fifteen francs on account; and things gradually came to such a pitch that, according to De Villemessant, the only way, at last, in which a visitor could obtain access to Dumas was to pretend to be a bailiff and demand admission in the name of the law.

It took some time, however, for matters to get as bad as that. The final crash was precipitated by the Revolution of 1848, which, as a matter of course, brought Dumas once more out into the open as a politician.

CHAPTER XIII

IT would be easy—indeed, it is usual—to write the history of the Revolution of 1848 without reference to Dumas. It is impossible—or, at any rate, it would be absurd—to write the Life of Dumas without reference to the Revolution of 1848. And that though there really is little to be said about his connection with it, except that he was there all the while.

He was there all the while, characteristically and conspicuously, in uniform, of course, with a sword in one hand and a pen in the other, and with burning coals of revolutionary fire in his mouth.

Not that the Revolution was any business of his. It was to do him more harm than good. It was to precipitate the inevitable bankruptcy. He was a Republican only because his father had been a Republican before him. Louis-Philippe had done him no harm, though he may have hurt his feelings by calling him a big baby. He had been his patron and benefactor, and so had two of his sons. But here was a "movement." Dumas must always be "in the movement," whatever the movement might be. Otherwise public attention might be distracted from him. So we see him playing his part, as a journalist, as an orator, as a Parliamentary candidate, and as a Colonel of the National Guard; and in each of these capacities he was the characteristic Dumas.

Perhaps he was at his most characteristic as a Parliamentary candidate. His election address is sublime:

"Here are my qualifications:

"Without counting six years of education, four years as a lawyer, seven years of office work, I have worked for twenty years for ten hours a day, 73,000 hours in all. During these twenty years I have composed four hundred books and thirty-five plays. The four hundred books have been issued in about a quarter of a million volumes and sold at five francs each—a total, to be precise, of 11,853,600 francs. The thirty-five dramas, played one hundred times each, on an average have produced royalties of 6,360,000 francs."

His success, of course, had been good for him; but it had also brought benefit to countless other persons—actors, stage carpenters, compositors, booksellers, etc.

"Let us take it that there are 300 working days in the year, and that my books have kept 690 people in constant employment, and that my dramas have given employment during the past ten years to 347 persons. That is for Paris. Multiply by three for the provinces, and you will find that 1,041 persons have thus been kept constantly at work. Add to these the women who show playgoers to their seats, the leaders of the claque, and the cabmen—total 1,458 people. Altogether, therefore, my books and plays have found work for 2,150 people."

It was magnificent. Perhaps—one never knows—it would have been successful if it had not been parodied by Paul de Kock, who also posed his candidature and, in vulgar phraseology, "went one better." "I have infinitely more claim," he declared on his posters, "to be a member of the constitutional assembly than the

citizen Alexandre Dumas," and he gave these, among other, reasons:

"No traveller comes to Paris without making a note that he must not forget to go and stare at Paul de Kock at the hour at which he is to be seen looking out of his window at the vendors of coconuts. Each of these travellers naturally takes the omnibus to the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Six sous. When he has seen me he takes another omnibus. Twelve sous. Twenty thousand travellers pay this visit every year. This has been going on for the last twenty years, and has consequently brought the omnibus company 4,800,000 sous. A crowd of women, whose names I am unwilling to disclose, but whose addresses can be given to any one who desires them, have asked me for my portrait. I have had my photograph taken some 3,000 times. Other women, still more in love with me, have begged for my autograph or for a lock of my hair."

That also was magnificent. Its competitive buffonery ruined Dumas' prospects, though it failed to secure his rival's election. But he tried again, and once more he conducted his candidature characteristically.

He set out on an electioneering tour. He threatened to punch the head of a heckler who called him a "nigger." He boasted that he had made the plain name of Dumas more famous than the titled name of the Marquis Davy de la Pailleterie. He moved audiences to tears, and he wept with them. He invited nearly every one with whom he shook hands to a banquet; and then, when the banquet was over, he discovered that he had set out on his journey without any money in his pocket, and left one of his local supporters to pay the bill—which may

or may not have been one of the reasons why he was defeated yet again.

As a colonel in the National Guard he also cut pretty much the figure which one would have expected him to cut. He put on his uniform, and drew his sword, and called on the citizens of Saint-Germain to march with him on Paris. But they would not march. They were mostly tradespeople to whom he owed substantial sums of money. They did not wish to die before they were paid, nor did they wish him to die before he had paid them. So they stayed at home while he marched on Paris alone, or with only two or three followers, and claimed to have been the only officer in uniform present when the mob burst into the Chamber of Deputies and vetoed the proposal to put the Duc d'Orléans on the throne with the Duchesse d'Orléans as Regent. And all this without any ill feeling, for, immediately after the deposition of Louis Philippe, we find him writing to the Duc de Montpensier, whom he had had to thank for his theatre:

"Monseigneur, I was proud to be styled your friend when you were in the Tuileries. Now that you have left France I claim that title still. I pray to God that I may never fail to preserve untainted the veneration which belongs to the grave and the worship which is due to exile."

Then, as a journalist, he proceeded to do what he could, or to see what he could do, for the royal family which he had just helped to evict.

He founded a paper *Le Mois*. He announced himself as its sole contributor. He adopted a proud motto: "God will dictate and we shall write." He protested

against the demolition of the equestrian statue of the Duc d'Orléans. He proposed that the princes of the House of Orléans should be recalled to France, and that the Duc d'Aumale should be put back in his post as Governor of Algeria.

But all in vain. Nobody took any notice. Nor was there any reason why anybody should take any notice.

Humorists can be taken seriously—they are the most serious people in the world, humour being the weapon with which those who are serious about big things smite those who are serious only about little things. Buffoons cannot—they are only giving a performance; and the trouble with Dumas was that, when he assumed the rôle of political philosopher, buffoonery would keep breaking in, and was always suspected of being about to break in, even when he talked sense and showed insight.

For he did sometimes talk sense, and he did sometimes foresee the future. Just as he had, in his conversation with Queen Hortense, in Switzerland, pointed out how Louis Napoleon might some day rise to power, so now, at the time of the first of the wars between Prussia and Denmark, he predicted the Prussian bid for European hegemony and the Prussian challenge to Austria and France.

If Thiers or Lamartine had said that, it would have been treated as a political prophecy. Said by Dumas, it was viewed merely as the pleasantry of a popular entertainer. It was forgotten almost as soon as it was said, as was also his shrewd remark that the King of the Belgians had made his position in the hearts of his people secure by constantly appearing on the balcony and threatening to leave them to their own devices and

dissensions if they did not behave better. Far more interest was taken in this boast, on his return from Amsterdam, where he had been present at the coronation of the King of Holland, of which he wrote an account:

"I wish it to be understood that when I attend such ceremonies, I do so, not as a reporter, but as a personal friend."

The real Dumas spoke there; and one need say nothing more about his political activities at this period than that the politicians went their way, leaving him to go his, and that his course was leading him by a short route towards the Court of Bankruptcy.

Not only was the entertainment of loose women and gate-crashers a constant drain on his resources: his political activities and excursions were also a hindrance to business, and the agitated political situation was unfavourable to money-making in literature and the arts. *Le Mois* was not a money-maker, but only an advertisement, and it interfered with his literary output. But that was not the worst. A more serious matter was the failure, largely due to the Revolution, of the Théâtre historique.

Its career began gloriously in February, 1847. Paris had never before seen such a queue as that which formed to await the opening of the doors. Hostein, who was managing the theatre for Dumas, describes the scene in his "Historiettes et Souvenirs d'un homme de théâtre":

"About ten o'clock in the evening women began to bring soup to those who were standing there. At midnight hot rolls, fresh from the oven, were brought to them. Then it occurred to some tradesmen in the neighbourhood to bring them trusses of clean straw on which they could lie down and take their ease voluptuously.

The night was a *fête* of cheery conversation, good order being never for a moment troubled. From time to time harmonious choruses were sung. Hundreds of lamps and lanterns supplied illumination, making the spectacle most animated and curious. At dawn people ate cakes and drank coffee, and some of them stopped the water carriers and performed their toilets as best they could."

When at last the doors were open, the crowd poured through them and found that everybody who was anybody was there: authors and journalists, such as Jules Janin, Théophile Gautier, Théodore de Banville, Henri Mürger and Delphine Gay; Auber and Halévy among the musicians; Horace Vernet, Delacroix and Ingres among the painters; Rachel and Déjazet among the actresses. The curtain rose on "La Reine Margot," and its success was immense. It was played for three months to crowded houses; and it was followed by other successes. The first year's receipts amounted to £28,000; and triumph was celebrated by a banquet at which Hostein proposed everybody's health in the florid language inspired by the communicative warmth of such occasions.

He began with the Duc de Montpensier: "the Prince who, by his noble and intelligent interest in science, letters and the arts, has won the devotion and warm sympathy of everyone who is an artist at heart." He proceeded to Dumas, "whose inexhaustible fancy and marvellous talent are equalled only by the daily admiration of his three million readers." He flattered Maquet, "whose talent is fused in that of Dumas, but only after the manner of mighty rivers whose separate course can be traced far out into the vast ocean." He went on to

flatter the actors, the musical directors, the musicians, the scene-painters, the prompter and the stage carpenter.

That was on 18 February, 1848. A week later, all was in the melting pot. The Revolution had broken out. The revolutionists had marched on the Tuileries, singing a chorus from one of Dumas' plays:

"Mourir pour la patrie,
Mourir pour la patrie,
C'est le sort le plus beau, le plus digne d'envie."

Montpensier, as well as Louis Philippe, had been driven into exile, though Dumas, with a characteristic gesture, informed him that his box would always be at his disposal. A tree of liberty was planted in front of the theatre, and a dance of liberty, for which the theatre orchestra provided the music, was organised.

And then, immediately afterwards, as if Nemesis insisted upon its rights, the theatre fell upon evil days.

It struggled on. The struggle lasted for about four years. Various authors were invited to come to the rescue: Victor Hugo, Balzac and Alfred de Musset among their number. A piece by Dumas *fils* was produced at the Théâtre historique, and so was a curtain raiser by Jules Verne; but nothing that was done sufficed to stop the rot. The receipts which had been £28,000 in 1847 were only £11,000 in 1848. They rose to a little over £20,000 in 1849, but dropped to £10,000 in 1850.

The competing interest of the Revolution was, no doubt, one cause of the failure; but it was not the only cause. Nor was the epidemic of cholera, which soon

followed it and helped to empty all the theatres, the only other cause. Dumas himself was a third. He had too profound a belief in his own popularity. He could not bring himself to believe that plays by Dumas were among the good things of which it was possible for the public to have too much. He gave them too much of his own work, reviving old plays as well as producing new ones; and they got tired of this and transferred their patronage to other theatres, with the result that unpleasant things began to happen.

Hostein, foreseeing trouble, forsook the sinking ship. Max de Revel, who took his place, did not retain it very long, being arrested and sent to prison for some irregularity in money matters. Management by a committee was next tried; but that expedient also failed to stop the rot. It became a question, on every pay day, whether the ghost would walk that week. First the ghost walked only irregularly and intermittently. Then it ceased to walk altogether, and the theatre was closed on 16 October, 1850, reopening only, for one benefit performance, on 27 October.

And Dumas was liable for its debts. He protested, representing that his interest in the theatre was not financial, but only artistic; but the Court held otherwise, and he had to find, or try to find, about £10,000.

He ought to have been able to find it. His income, during these years in which he was at the height of his prosperity, is estimated to have ranged between £10,000 and £20,000 a year. But he had saved nothing. It was during those years that he borrowed from his collaborators instead of settling with them; and, even so, he was, in the midst of his wealth, so pressed for ready

money that he wrote to ask one of his editors for an advance of ten pounds, only to receive the answer:

"My dear Dumas:

"I am not the cashier of *La Presse*. I am only, like yourself, a member of the staff."

So he was sold up. Monte Cristo was brought to the hammer, and its miscellaneous treasures were scattered. It had cost £12,000 to build. It fetched £1,200; and when it was sold Dumas sought shelter in Brussels.

It was his first severe rebuff; but the idea that France wanted an historical theatre, and that he was the man of all others whom France wished to see at the head of it, lingered with him; and the story of his second attempt to found such a theatre may as well be told here.

He was then sixty-four; and he issued a remarkable and characteristic prospectus in the form of a circular letter addressed to "all my friends, known or unknown, in France or abroad."

He could not, he told them, afford to advertise his enterprise in the usual way—he was too poor. But he was poor only because he had been charitable, having, in the course of his life, given away at least £20,000. His only capital was the sympathy he had earned and the popularity which he had won. These acquisitions, he thought, might serve him in place of capital when he proposed to restore French dramatic art, now in such a bad way, to the pinnacle on which the men of 1830 had placed it. So he appealed to every one of these friends, unknown and known, to pay him in advance for two seats in the new Théâtre historique which he proposed

to organise. If they would do so, his dream, which he assumed also to be theirs, would become a reality, and he would be amply repaid for "the forty years of laborious toil which give me the right to pen the somewhat boastful words to which I append my signature."

But nothing came of that. Dumas had outlived his reputation, and there was no response to his appeal.

CHAPTER XIV

AS it was immediately after Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* that Dumas fled to Brussels, people assumed that he was, like Victor Hugo, who had also gone there, a political fugitive.

He was nothing of the kind. Louis Napoleon had never done him any harm, and he, on his part, had, as we have seen, advised Louis Napoleon's mother, when he met her in Switzerland, to advise her son to usurp Louis Philippe's throne. But he liked the pose of a fugitive, seeing no reason why Hugo should monopolise the limelight; and he did go so far—to the delight, it is said, of Louis Napoleon's cousin, Princess Mathilde—as to speak of the Emperor as "that damned Dutchman," the suggestion being that he was, as scandal reported, the son, not of the King of Holland, but of a Dutch admiral.

His real purpose, however, in going to Brussels was merely to keep out of the way while his lawyers arranged a composition with his creditors; and the only interesting piece of business which he transacted there was to convey delicately to Victor Hugo's wife a message from her husband to the effect that, though he still loved her fairly well, he loved Juliette Drouet a great deal better, and felt that the free play of such a genius as his ought not to be impeded by the discomfort of either repressions or reproaches.

It is a commission which one can picture Dumas accepting with enthusiasm and executing with tact, no repressions having ever been allowed to interrupt his gaieties, and his own marriage never having been regarded by him as a bar to other amorous enterprises. No doubt he knew—for all literary Paris knew—that Mme Hugo had sought consolation for her husband's neglect in a little affair with Sainte-Beuve; so that he and she may very well have mingled the tears of sensibility over the amorous changes and chances of this transitory but exciting life. And then, his task discharged and his creditors appeased, with only sixteen pounds in his purse and all the rest of his belongings packed into a single suit-case, he returned to Paris and embarked on a new career as a newspaper proprietor.

Le Mousquetaire: Journal de Monsieur Alexandre Dumas was the title of the newspaper which he founded. He had no capital behind him, and, after his failure, very little credit. Practically his sole asset was the "good will" of a genial, persuasive and popular personality; and that might have sufficed if he had engaged a competent editor to exploit it and a competent business manager to see to it that the coat was cut according to the cloth. But he took neither of these wise precautions. He trusted to his luck and his genius; and the luck turned against him because his genius was not exactly the sort of genius which the conductors of newspapers require.

At first, indeed, he did engage a business manager, who, though he was very far from competent and, as one of his colleagues relates, "went about the office looking as dazed and bewildered as if he had just been

ALEXANDRE DUMAS (père)

thrown off a horse," had, at any rate, some knowledge of newspaper routine: a certain Martinet, who had come to him from the *Siècle*. But Martinet did not stay long. Dumas and he fell out as soon as the first bills came in: the inevitable bills of the printers, the paper-makers, the upholsterers who had furnished the office, and the contributors who had supplied the copy.

Dumas came in one morning and found those bills on his desk. He summoned Martinet and remonstrated.

"What is the meaning of this, Martinet?" he demanded. "This is not my business, but yours. Why don't you attend to it and pay these people?"

"How can I pay them when there is no money in the office?" Martinet rejoined.

"No money?" roared Dumas. "What has become of the money? Where are the subscriptions? Where is the money taken over the counter yesterday for the cash sales?"

"You put it all in your pocket, saying that you needed it for your personal expenses," Martinet explained.

"But that was only twelve pounds," Dumas protested. "My own contributions to the paper, inserted to-day and yesterday, are surely worth at least forty pounds. You know perfectly well that I could have drawn double that amount from any other newspaper in Paris, and the cashier wouldn't have missed it. Why can't I do the same here?"

Whereupon Martinet wagged his bewildered head and moralised:

"Ah, M. Dumas, those other papers are old-established properties. They have been in existence for

thirty years or more. *Le Mousquetaire* has not yet been in existence for thirty days. You must have patience and wait till your acorn becomes an oak."

But Dumas was impatient and would not wait. He preferred the simpler course of dismissing Martinet and appointing a new business manager; and his new choice was a strange one—old Michel, who had been his gardener at Monte Cristo and was now looking out for a new job.

Michel, it is said, could neither read nor write; but he had one great merit in Dumas' eyes. He was the resourceful servitor who, in the Monte Cristo days, had been accustomed to keep creditors at bay by setting booby traps for them and so embogging them in muddy ditches. There is, indeed, no record of his having done anything of that sort at the Maison d'Or, as the office of the newspaper was happily and hopefully called; but *Le Mousquetaire*, after his appointment to a post which he regarded and treated as a sinecure, was conducted on free and easy lines without parallel in the history of journalism.

One presumes that it must have had a staff because all newspapers have staffs; but it is impossible to make out of whom the staff consisted, or who assigned its several members their respective functions. Anybody who proposed to contribute appears to have been welcomed with open-hearted cordiality, promised any stipend that he liked to ask for, and even allowed, if there happened to be any money in the office when he called, to draw something on account. On the other hand, no contributor seems ever to have succeeded in regularly drawing the agreed stipend, or, for that matter, to have

recognized the obligation of doing any work in order to earn it.

Nor did the office in the least resemble any ordinary newspaper office. It was much more like a Bohemian club—what used, in London, before women were emancipated, to be called a Cock and Hen Club. All Dumas' friends and acquaintances, whose name was legion, dropped in, whenever they chose, bringing their own friends and acquaintances with them, just as though the office were a café on the Boulevard. They all talked at the tops of their voices, and they all talked at once. The hubbub of their talk floated out through the window, far down the street, with the result that the neighbours made remarks. One neighbour conjectured that a pig was being killed in the office; another that the shrieks which he heard must be those of a woman in labour. The only person who was thoroughly pleased by the uproar was the proprietor of the café opposite, who exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully:

"Good. If the police ever complain that my customers are making too much noise, I shall tell them to cross the road and listen to the noise in the office of *Le Mousquetaire*."

How, in the midst of all that din, *Le Mousquetaire* managed to get itself written, printed, published and sold is a mystery which those contributors who afterwards wrote their recollections of it professed to find insoluble. Dumas himself, it is true, did work. He sat in an upper chamber alone, writing, as if for dear life, all day long, and some one or other on the managerial side contrived, somehow or other, to establish a forced currency consisting of verbal promises to pay. But, even

so, the daily production of the paper was a daily miracle which one of the contributors compared to the miracle of the multitude and the loaves and fishes recorded in Holy Writ; and one is not surprised to learn that the conscientious but bewildered Martinet found himself ill at ease in the unaccustomed *milieu*, and shouted, again and again, before his departure, that a newspaper conducted in this haphazard style could not possibly last three months.

One contributor only—the so-called "Countess Dash," who supplied a column of social gossip—was always sure of receiving her remuneration. There is some reason to believe that she was one of Dumas' "occasional" mistresses; and that may have been the reason why, at the end of every week, she was invariably handed a golden louis, carefully wrapped up in tissue paper, and also the reason why, when she came to write her reminiscences, she wrote kindly of Dumas, expressing the opinion that he would quite possibly have made a very good husband to a wife who had the good sense to turn a blind eye to his vagaries.

The blinding of the eyes would certainly have been a precaution necessary to any wife's peace of mind even at the time when Dumas was supposed to be, and indeed generally was, absorbed in his literary and editorial labours. For he did sometimes receive visitors even then; and the visitors were sometimes women, and no one believed that the proceedings, after the door of the editorial sanctum had been closed, were confined to the discussion of the contributions which they offered. Nor did Dumas himself ever pretend that they were so limited in any case except that of Mme Clémence

Bader, who was remarkable, not for her beauty and her charm, but for her eccentricity.

This lady was not only married and middle-aged, but respectable. Her husband was a magistrate's clerk at Vendôme, and, having private means, was fairly well-to-do. His wife had great literary ambitions, but no literary competence, both her orthography and her syntax being shaky. Even the local papers in her own neighbourhood declined her contributions with thanks. She showed some of her compositions, however, to some of the notables of the neighbourhood, and they, being very polite men, said such very polite things about them, that her head was turned by their flattery and she announced her intention of going to Paris, "to make," as she put it, "a name in literature." There is no evidence that M. Bader made any attempt to detain her.

Having arrived in Paris, she paid a round of visits to the newspaper offices and insisted on seeing all the editors and showing them the articles which she had written on such innocent botanical subjects as "the misfortunes of a rose," "the amours of a violet" and "the adventures of a periwinkle." They, like the Vendôme notables, being polite men, expressed the most flattering admiration of her gifts, but also their extreme regret that the policy of their papers and the terrible pressure on their space prevented them, etc., etc., etc. But she would not take "no" for an answer. She called again, and yet again, until she became the laughing-stock of all the newspaper offices in Paris, and junior sub-editors and reporters took to playing practical jokes on her.

One of them—no other than Henri Rochefort, who was presently to be so famous—introduced himself

to her as Dumas the Younger, made ardent love to her, in that character, in the presence of the whole staff, and besought her to collaborate with him in writing a play, with the result that she called on Dumas the Younger, and was received by a grave young man whom she had never before seen and who wondered who on earth she was, and what on earth she wanted.

Another of them sent her a forged declaration of love, bearing the signature of an eminent editor—Emile de Girardin of *La Presse*. His position in Paris was hardly less important than that of Lord Northcliffe in London when he was editing the *Daily Mail;* and the letter represented that he wished to lay both his heart and his fortune at Mme Bader's feet. When she called on him, intending to accept the gift in the spirit in which it was offered, and explained her business, as she was required to do, to a commissionaire, she was taken for a wandering lunatic and shown the door.

It was after these adventures that she found her way to the office of *Le Mousquetaire* and was shown to Dumas' room.

He was not attracted—she was not attractive; but he was affable—all women always found him affable. He promised to print the article which she offered him without even troubling to look at it—he was a man who would always promise any woman anything. And he kept his promise, the paper being, as usual, rather hard up for copy; but he edited the article severely, correcting the spelling and the grammar, and embellishing it with certain flowers of fancy of his own, with the result that Mme Bader lost her temper.

She threatened an action for damages; but her lawyers

advised her that she had no case. She called again at the office, but was told this time that the editor was too busy to see her. She then called at his private address in the rue d'Amsterdam, but was held up in the hall by a solid phalanx of domestic servants. She then wrote, demanding as her right the publication of the actual text of her article; and Dumas, being still hard up for copy, published it, printing all her ungrammatical locutions in italics, and adding some hilariously sarcastic comments. She retorted by writing a disobliging pamphlet about him, informing the world that he had three chins—a charge to which there was no answer; and she then passed out of his life for ever. But she outlived him, if any one cares to know, and advertised herself, as recently as 1876, on the Paris hoardings, in letters two feet high, as the writer of a book entitled "The Mysteries of Creation revealed."

That is the story of the most memorable of the interruptions of Dumas' editorial labours. Others occurred when perfect strangers forced or bluffed or insinuated their way into his sanctum in order to beg or borrow. A German, whom he had never seen before and was never to see again, once found his way to it and extracted fifty francs from him by threatening to drown himself in the Seine if he did not get them. It was, we are told, practically all the money in the office at the time; and Dumas, having parted with it, had only two francs left with which to pay for his own dinner. And he was a man with an enormous appetite.

Fortune refused, as Martinet had predicted that it would, to smile on a periodical so edited.

Le Mousquetaire did, indeed, begin well, with a won-

derful flourish of trumpets. Victor Hugo, grateful to Dumas for persuading his wife to be polite to his mistress, sent him a characteristic letter of congratulation from Guernsey: "I read your paper; you are bringing us back Voltaire." It was in a congratulatory letter written from his exile in Italy that Michelet acclaimed him as "one of the forces of nature." Heine wrote to congratulate him from his "mattress grave." Lamartine wrote:

"My dear Dumas:

"You ask for my opinion about your paper. I have opinions on things human, but not on miracles—you are superhuman. The world has sought perpetual motion. You have given it something better than perpetual motion—you have created perpetual amazement. Good-bye. May you live—that is, may you write. I am here to read anything that you write."

Launched to the accompaniment of these compliments, the paper began with a circulation of 10,000—quite a good circulation for the period. It had a band of contributors brilliant enough, if their labours had been properly controlled and directed, to keep the sales at that figure, or even to lift them beyond it. Many of them were destined afterwards to make great names for themselves in journalism—Aurélien Scholl and Henri Rochefort, for instance. Others, like Théophile Gautier, had already made their names. Roger de Beauvoir—the same Roger de Beauvoir whom Dumas had discovered hiding in his wife's dressing-room and had forgiven on the ground that he and Roger were too old friends to quarrel about a woman—was also of the company. His

help may have been the more welcome because he was a man of means, writing for his amusement, and could afford to make bad debts.

There were times, too, when rich friends offered financial help which fell like the unexpected manna in the wilderness. Polydore Millaud, already a rich man, and destined to make a huge fortune by founding the famous *Petit Journal*, wrote one day apropos of some appeal that *Le Mousquetaire* was making on behalf of a charity:

"My dear Friend:

"You are marvellous as a collector of philanthropic subscriptions. Your paper is excellent as a charity, but it is no good as a business proposition. Permit me to send you £400. Then you will be able to advertise your paper, and it will prosper."

But though the paper was advertised, it did not prosper. Michel offered a bright suggestion from the cashier's office in which he had been installed. The secret of success, he said, would be found only if all the creditors became subscribers, but then it would be assured; and one feels that, though this appreciation of the state of things may not have been quite true, it must have been very nearly true.

The secret of success, however, whatever it may have been, was never found; and it is easy enough to lay one's finger on the explanation of the failure. The paper failed, in the first place, because it was a political paper without a policy competing with political papers which had policies; and, in the second place, because it was thrown

together instead of being edited. The contributors, never being sure of receiving any reward for their labours, wrote only when they chose, and then wrote what they chose. Dumas himself was the only man in the office who wrote both hard and regularly; and he had such complete confidence in the magic effect of his name that, though he was notoriously ignorant of Greek, he once scandalised literary Paris by publishing as a serial story "to be continued in our next," a translation of the "Iliad" which one of his secretaries had dictated to him.

Papers thus conducted cannot possibly succeed; and the time came, before very long, when a public which had begun by admiring Dumas for his audacity took to laughing at him for his impudence. Scholars laughed at him for his presumption in shuffling in the shoes of the author of the "Iliad." Journalists laughed at him, as other journalists, at a later date, were to laugh at an English journalist, for representing that every man with whom he had ever exchanged a word or a nod was his dear and intimate friend. One journalist professed to have taken a census of the men whom he had claimed as his dear and intimate friends and found that they numbered 36,000. His staff, too, lost patience with him, with the result that, one day, he published this remarkable editorial note:

"We have good news for our readers. All my collaborators have just tendered their resignations. There is consequently no longer any reason why everybody should not subscribe."

The public, however, did not rise to the bait. Dumas, for a while, dispensed with collaborators and wrote practically the whole paper himself. Then, having

enlisted new collaborators, or made his peace with the old ones, he left most of the work to them in order to be free to travel or to earn money in other ways. But neither of these measures prevented the subscription list from dwindling; and Dumas was simultaneously worried by lawsuits with Maquet and other collaborators who were laying claim to a share both of his royalties and of his renown.

"I'm sick of the whole business," he told one of his friends; and he decided to kill the paper and go abroad.

CHAPTER XV

DUMAS' newspapers did not, like his theatre, land him in bankruptcy. He simply found them unprofitable, got tired of them, and dropped them. *Le Mousquetaire* disappeared in that way, and so did *Monte Cristo*—a weekly paper which he founded soon after the daily had died. But their disappearance did not leave him impoverished, though it is, as always, impossible to make head or tale of the conflicting accounts given of his financial position and proceedings.

On the one hand, we have such stories as that just told of his giving his last fifty francs to a stranger who had threatened to throw himself into the Seine if he did not get them. On the other hand, we hear of his maintaining an establishment, with, at least, three servants in the rue d'Amsterdam, lavishly entertaining all his acquaintances, and always being provided with ready money when he wanted to set out on a journey.

Nobody knows how he did it. Nobody will ever know. His daughter's housekeeping may have helped—she probably had a more frugal mind than the Bohemian ladies who had kept house in the Villa Monte Cristo. The damages awarded to him as the result of a lawsuit with his publishers must also have been helpful—the more so because he refrained from applying any part of them to the payment of his debts. One presumes, too, that the habit of raiding the treasury of *Le Mousquetaire*

for the satisfaction of his personal needs grew upon him; and one does not know at what fanciful rate he paid himself for his secretary's translation of the "Iliad."

Anyhow, he had money and he did travel. He went to London, to study, among other things, the English Sunday. He went to Russia, and produced a bright book about his journey, having got as far afield as Astrakhan, Trebizond and Finland. He wrote another bright book about the Sinai Peninsula, which he had not troubled to visit, and was thanked and congratulated by Mehemet Ali; and then, with £2,000 in his pocket, he set out on an excursion which began as an incident in a love affair and resolved itself into a military expedition.

There had lately been yet another change of partners in the cake walk. An actress called Isabelle Constant had, for a little while, been his favourite. A much more distinguished actress—the celebrated Augustine Brohan—had commented, half in scorn and half in annoyance, on his habit of bringing his Isabelle, his "better" half, as she styled her, with him whenever he accepted an invitation. But this Isabelle had now ceased to reign. Her place had been taken by Emilie Cordier; and Emilie, in male attire, disguised, or, at any rate, dressed as a midshipman, and referred to as "the Admiral," accompanied Dumas on the *Emma*,—the tiny yacht on which he set out to "discover," as he put it, the Mediterranean.

The departure was spectacular. The publicity was well arranged. Tradesmen who desired publicity overwhelmed the departing explorer with oblations of wine, perfume and tobacco. The boatmen who rowed him out to the Château d'If refused payment for their services. The notables of Marseilles entertained him at a banquet,

whereat he found the freedom of the city wrapped up in his napkin.

He announced that his destination was the Holy Land. He evidently saw himself as a pilgrim, like his friend Chateaubriand, whose pilgrimage had ended with the keeping of a sentimental appointment made, before he set out, to meet a fascinating lady in the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra; and one cannot doubt that a really remarkable book of travels would have resulted if Dumas had, indeed, climbed the Mount of Olives and basked in the Garden of Gethsemane, accompanied by Emilie Cordier, attired as a comic-opera midshipman in "violet velvet with blue and gold trimmings."

But that was not to be. On his way to the Holy Land by a circuitous route—he had stopped to attend a theatrical garden party given by Alphonse Karr at Nice—Dumas heard of the expedition of Garibaldi and his Thousand to Sicily to lead the Sicilian revolt against the King of Naples and crown Victor Emmanuel of Piedmont King of United Italy. He already knew Garibaldi and had begun to write a book about him. It now seemed to him that, as Garibaldi's adventure was a noble and heroic enterprise, it behoved him to be "in it."

Whether he was very deeply in it is another question.

He himself certainly believed that he had been Garibaldi's right-hand man; but the serious histories of the campaign say very little about him, and those of them who do mention him are not always complimentary. The foreign soldiers of fortune who really fought for Garibaldi were the Hungarian General Türr, and Colonel Peard, whom all the world knows as "Garibaldi's Englishman," and Major Wyndham, and Maxime Du

Camp, who was on Türr's staff. Commander Stuart Forbes, of the British Navy, who also went through the campaign, speaks with enthusiasm of the military qualities of Türr and Peard; but his only reference to Dumas relates to a privilege bestowed upon him after Garibaldi had placed him in charge of the Public Works at Naples, and runs as follows:

"In the Government Gazette of the 21st, I find Alexander Dumas has been diverting himself in the royal preserves at Capo di Monte. It is currently reported that he is better fitted to kill pheasants than to preside over public works. Of course you will all be rabid in England at his appointment, but, at the same time, it is well to remember we have had mountebanks in our own Government."

That is not flattering, and it is not quite just. It is not impossible for a mountebank to be an enthusiast or for an enthusiast to be a mountebank. Dumas, for once, doubled the parts. A cold-blooded British critic, bred in the correctitude of the silent service, was naturally less impressed by Dumas' services to the cause than by the buffoonery which kept breaking in while he was rendering them; but those services were real and valuable, though they did not bring him under fire or justify the gaudy uniform which he wore.

He spent the £2,000, which was to have defrayed the cost of his excursion, on munitions of war for Garibaldi's troops; and he went to see Cavour on Garibaldi's behalf, and undertook one or two other semi-diplomatic missions. And Garibaldi rewarded him, after the victory had been won, by giving him the unsalaried post of Director of Fine Arts at Naples and by consenting to stand as godfather to the daughter borne to him by the en-

chantress whom he had dressed up as a midshipman and called an admiral.

Micaella was the child's name; but there is nothing more to be said about her except that her mother, her intimacy with Dumas having gone the way of all the previous intimacies, declined his proposal to adopt her and give her his name, so that she passed out of his life almost as soon as she had passed into it: a matter of little importance to his biographer, seeing that he once told some one that he believed himself to be the father of at least five hundred children, and that, as will be generally admitted, he could not very well have adopted them all without allowing romance to degenerate into burlesque.

A more serious matter was his failure to give satisfaction in his post as Director of Fine Arts and Antiquarian Excavations.

This was a post which he took very seriously, in spite of the fact that it was unpaid. Maxime Du Camp, who had known him in Paris, went to see him as soon as he was installed in his office, at a time when the Royal forces were still holding out against the Garibaldians at Capua, and draws this picture of him:

"He was then sixty, and his eternal youthfulness was never more conspicuously apparent. His great height, his strong and square-built figure, his perpetually smiling face, his large head, crowned with curly grey hair, his determination to make himself pleasant, his deep chest and his firm step gave him the appearance of a good-tempered Hercules. Like those giants who know their strength and are afraid of abusing it, he was gentle. Never have I seen him show a sign of anger or make a gesture

of impatience. If ever there was an amiable man in the true sense of the word—a man born to be loved—he was that man."

The plans of Pompeii were spread on the table when Maxime Du Camp called. Dumas showed them to him. He boasted that his workmen's pickaxes would soon "bring the whole world of antiquity to light." He announced his intention of requesting Victor Emmanuel to lend him a company of sappers to do the digging and of sending to Paris for artists, archæologists and other experts to arrange and classify the treasures found. But unfortunately a storm of which he was unaware was brewing. The archæologists were eager and the sappers were willing to help, but the Neapolitan populace objected. It was nothing to them that Dumas was doing the work for nothing, took a keen interest in it, and meant to do it thoroughly. In their eyes he was merely an undesirable alien whose interference with the excavations was keeping some Neapolitan patriot out of a job. They assembled and rioted in front of his house, bawling furiously:

"Death to Dumas! Dumas must be pitched into the sea!"

Nothing came of it. Rumours of the coming riot had reached Maxime Du Camp, and he had arranged for military protection. It was only the work of a minute or two for the soldiers to scatter the mob. There were no casualties, and Dumas struck the dramatic attitude which was natural to him and appropriate to the occasion. When he had been given his appointment he had said:

"If France has nothing for her poets but a crown of

misery and the staff of exile, foreign lands keep for them the crown of bays and the triumphal car."

Now that he had lost it, he exclaimed with equal emphasis:

"I am used to ingratitude in France. I was not expecting ingratitude in Italy."

And then, when the colonel who had driven the rioters away spoke contemptuously of them, saying that they still were what they had been in the time of Masaniello:

"Pooh! The Neapolitans are just like other people. To expect the populace anywhere not to be ungrateful is as absurd as it would be to expect wolves not to be carnivorous. When I count up the gains which I have derived from the making of United Italy—the time that I have lost and the money that I have spent—I really do not see why they should be thrown in my teeth. These people's character must, indeed, be strange if they think that I deserve to be turned out."

He was not turned out. He was, instead, invited to be the guest of honour at a banquet given by Garibaldi's staff and accorded that permission to shoot pheasants on the royal domains which provoked the sarcastic comments of Commander Forbes; and he remained at Naples for another four years, working as hard as ever, writing his books about Garibaldi and the Garibaldians, and a number of novels, as well as the greater part of the contents of a daily paper which he edited.

If he had not been editing that daily paper—justifying his boast to Louis Philippe that the poet was the prelude to the politician—he might have stayed there still longer. As an editor, however, he was rather a political irritant

than a political force. Invested in his motley he took leave to speak his mind when friction occurred between his friend Garibaldi and the King whom Garibaldi had provided with a crown.

"Look at those soldiers," he said to Maxime Du Camp, as they stood together at the window when Victor Emmanuel made his triumphal entry into Naples. "Take a good look at them. There isn't a single red shirt among them—not a single one of the volunteers of Marsala and Palermo and Volturno. There are no honours for them, though they bore the burden and heat of the day. All the honours are for the men from Piedmont. They are going to eat the chestnuts which the others pulled out of the fire for them. Oh, yes, the kings are as ungrateful as the peoples. One must never expect any reward from them when one does a noble action. That is the only way in which one can avoid disappointment and possess one's soul in peace."

But Dumas did not possess his soul in peace. The fires within forbade. A grievance, whether his own or another's, always compelled him to burst into eruption like a volcano. He resented Victor Emmanuel's treatment of Garibaldi; and when Garibaldi was frozen out, or bowed himself out, he compared Victor Emmanuel, who owed his throne to Garibaldi, to a receiver of stolen goods presuming to look down on the thief from the lofty pedestal of moral and social superiority.

It was hardly the way in which to make his position in Naples comfortable; and it is not surprising to learn that Victor Emmanuel's police, acting on instructions from above, proceeded to make his position there extremely uncomfortable and so, in the early spring of

1864, brought him to the conclusion that his Neapolitan mission was accomplished, and that it was time for him to return to Paris.

A remarkable incident had, however, intervened. Dumas had received from a correspondent who claimed to be a Prince of the House of Scanderbeg, an appeal to champion yet another revolutionary cause: to help to liberate Albania from the Turks, as he had helped to liberate Naples and Sicily from the Bourbons, and to accept the style and title of "general charged with the superintendence of the military depots of the Christian Army of the Orient."

He had been tempted; he had nearly fallen. He had exchanged several letters with his Scanderbeg, signing himself "Your Royal Highness's very humble and obedient servant." He had even made his arrangements for sailing to Durazzo to take up his position as a general when the chief of the Neapolitan police sent for him and informed him that his Scanderbeg was not really a Scanderbeg, but a practical joker, very well known to him—and not at all favourably known—born of humble parents in the Abruzzi.

Such is the story as told by M. Lucas-Dubreton in his recent Life of Dumas; but it has a sequel which M. Lucas-Dubreton omits to tell.

Ten years later, in January, 1872, a Scanderbeg turned up in Paris, where he shared an office with a Count Bustelli-Foscolo, who described himself as European Minister of the Republic of Honduras.

He was a very imposing and decorative person, apparently from forty to forty-five years of age, with a chestnut beard, spread out like a fan, attired in a

frogged coat, with epaulettes, tight trousers, which showed the outline of his shapely leg, fur-lined top-boots and a fez. He styled himself His Royal Highness Prince George Kastriota Scanderbeg, King of Albania and Epirus, hereditary Prince of Croia, and of all the Albanian Colonies, Duke of Saint-Pierre in Galatina, patrician of Rome, Naples and Venice. He had with him, as Grand Marshal of the Palace, a retired Neapolitan commissary of police, and as Captain of the Guard, a retired French police inspector.

It occurred to the Prefect of Police to make a few enquiries; and he instructed M. Macé, the head of the Criminal Investigation Department, to call on the distinguished stranger. M. Macé paid his call, and was not only affably received, but was offered a commission in that very Christian Army of the Orient in which Dumas had, so many years before, been offered a commission as general. He acknowledged the compliment in suitable terms, but continued his investigations, and discovered that Prince George was distributing right and left—but not gratuitously—the insignia of a certain Order of the Commander of Christ.

And one of the people to whom he offered the insignia of the Order was Dumas' son.

He had met the Elder Dumas, he said, at Naples. He had become so friendly with him that Dumas had given him the manuscript of an unpublished work of his entitled "Ames vaillantes," which he treasured in his archives as the most precious of his possessions. Whereto Dumas *fils* replied, addressing his answer to Bustelli-Foscolo:

"SIR:

"I have often heard my father speak of 'Ames vaillantes.' It was a composition with which he was extremely pleased. I did not know what had become of it. It would be very kind of your friend if he would have a copy made of it at my expense and sent to my copyist, Mme Lachèze, 92 Boulevard Saint-Michel. She will forward it to me.

"As for the diploma of the Order of the Commander of Christ, I have never asked for it, and I have never heard of it; but I should receive it with the greater gratitude because I should owe it to the initiative of an unsolicited sympathy.

"I thank you for your letter. It is a pleasanter letter than most of those which I receive. The people who write to one for the purpose of rendering a service are few and far between."

So the bait was swallowed. Dumas the Younger was imposed upon by the very impostor against whose wiles the Neapolitan police had warned his father. He knelt before him, and was tapped on the shoulder with his sword, and listened to the flattering sentence: "In the name of our ancestors, we, Prince of Scanderbeg, King of Albania and Epirus, bid you rise as a Knight of this, our Order."

And then the police, having at last concluded their investigations, told him who this royal patron of his was.

His name was Del Prato. He was the son of an Italian carpenter. In 1859 he had served a sentence of six months imprisonment at Mazas for fraud. He had

ALEXANDRE DUMAS (fils)

returned to Paris, expecting to be safe there against all suspicions because he knew that the contents of the police archives had been burnt during the Commune; and he had prospered by selling to the gullible, at a high price, the gaudy insignia of a non-existent Order.

Nor did he pay any penalty for this offence. The police, coming to arrest him, found that he had been warned in time and had got safely over the Spanish frontier, taking with him the sum of four hundred pounds which he had abstracted from the safe of his friend, the so-called European Minister of the Republic of Honduras.

CHAPTER XVI

DECADENCE had begun when Dumas quarrelled with Maquet and fled to Brussels to escape his creditors. It had continued, without being very perceptible, while he was editing *Le Mousquetaire* and *Monte Cristo*, and while he was helping Garibaldi at Naples. It became so conspicuous that even he himself could not help noticing it when he returned to France in 1864.

He had been too long away. He came back to realise the truth of the saying that "the absent are always in the wrong."

A host of friends welcomed him and told him how glad they were to see him again. He was the sort of man to whom hosts of friends always say that sort of thing, and say it honestly. But the people who were most sincerely glad to see him were the parasites whose costly attachment to him once moved him to explain his financial embarrassments by saying: "People compare me to a sieve. They forget that it was not I who pierced the holes in the sieve." We shall see in a moment how they gathered round him and fastened on him once again.

His reputation, of course, was recognized. No one could rob him of it or deny that it had been immense. But it belonged to the past. Twenty years had elapsed since the publication of "The Three Musketeers" and nineteen since the publication of "Monte Cristo." At

sixty-two, he had, in a sense, "survived himself"; and the general attitude towards him, alike of the critics and of the public, resembled that of a child tired of an old toy and petulantly anxious for a new one.

If he had saved money, as he so easily might have done, he would have grown old with dignity, living on his reputation, and looking down, as Victor Hugo did, from Olympian heights on the young men who were making theirs. But he had saved no money. Consequently he was condemned to the life of the literary galley slave, chained to the oar, writing to live and living to write, while his powers gradually flagged. That is the story, in a nutshell, of his last years, though it was some time before the collapse was complete.

For the first few weeks after his return he lived in an apartment lent to him by his friend, Polydore Millaud, in the office of *Le Petit Journal*. Then he took a villa for the summer at Enghien, whither we will follow him, noting certain parallels and certain contrasts.

For the life at Enghien was, as it were, a poor and shabby imitation of the life in the Villa Monte Cristo at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

Both lives were Bohemian; but in the Villa Monte Cristo the Bohemianism had at least been magnificently gilded. At Enghien the Bohemianism was as Bohemian as ever, but the gilt was coming off in strips.

Dumas had grown older without growing wiser. His extravagances had always kept him poor, even when there was plenty of money about. Now he was poorer because his popularity was on the wane. He found it harder to earn money, though he still earned a fair amount; and, as the old weaknesses remained, he indulged them on a

lower plane. The contrasts make the picture painful to contemplate, its central figure standing out no longer as a man of genius laughingly defying all conventional restrictions, but as a graceless old reprobate reduced to strange shifts to keep his head above water.

The worst, indeed, was yet to come. Though Dumas was now fat and grey, his health was not yet perceptibly undermined. He was still energetic. He still cherished the hope of making a fortune. He still amused himself and entertained his friends while kicking vigorously against the pricks; and he still emerged, now and again, from Bohemia to meet the people who did not descend into it—Princess Mathilde, for instance, and Emile de Girardin, who had houses in the neighbourhood. But he was, nevertheless, sliding down the slope towards the abyss.

Of course there was a *faux ménage* at Enghien. It is impossible to think of Dumas without a *faux ménage*. But it was a *faux ménage* of a new kind. At the Villa Monte Cristo he had lived in his *faux ménage* as a sultan in his harem, and the odalisques had been, as it were, slaves from whom he stood no nonsense. At Enghien we see him falling, for the first time in his life—an unmistakable sign of decadence—under the tyranny of the caprices of a woman of no importance.

Micaella's mother—the "cabin boy" of the *Emma*—had passed out of his life. She had admitted an infidelity, and he had dismissed her with a magnificent gesture, assuring her that he still loved her—"but only as one loves those who are dead and gone." It was the last magnificent gesture of the kind of which we hear. The woman who reigned in Micaella's mother's place was

the first woman who succeeded in speaking to Dumas as one having authority.

Her name was Fanny Gordosa. He had picked her up at Naples and brought her to France. She sang a little, in a thin but pleasant voice, and expected Dumas' influence to procure her an engagement at the Opera. It was represented to her that she needed more music lessons before that would be possible. She took them at Dumas' expense in Dumas' house. She flooded his house with music masters—a class of men whom he detested. She insisted upon his inviting them to stay to lunch. It became a matter of course, not only that they should stay to lunch as often as they liked, but that they should bring their friends to lunch with them.

Once more, therefore, Dumas found himself keeping open house for parasites and gate-crashers; but they were parasites and gate-crashers of an inferior quality—men who not only sponged on him for meals, but expected him to pay their cab fares. It is said that once five-and-twenty cabmen turned up on a single morning, asseverating that five-and-twenty guests whom the master had entertained at dinner on the previous evening had referred them to the master for the payment of their dues. Under such conditions, as may be supposed, the gaiety of life diminished. The records of the period are absurd enough; but the laughter has a hollow ring. The story suggests a practical joke which has ceased to be amusing because the hilarity of youth has gone.

The establishment was a fairly large one. The house stood in a garden nearly large enough to be called a park, running down to the Enghien lake. It contained rooms enough to accommodate both secretaries and

visitors. There was no such army of retainers, indeed, as there had been at the Villa Monte Cristo; but there were three servants. Everything might very well have been done decently, decorously and in order; but the picture which one gets is that of Dumas and those about him pigging it in a mansion.

A single anecdote may serve to show how sordid the Bohemianism had become.

Dumas at that time had a secretary, one M. Pifteau, and this gentleman had a mistress. His mistress conceived the idea—whether rightly or wrongly one does not know and need not try to find out—that the lady at the head of Dumas' establishment was supplanting her in M. Pifteau's affections. So little were forms and ceremonies observed in the house that the young woman was not only able to enter it, but actually walked with M. Pifteau into the bedroom of her supposed rival and brought railing accusations against her. And Dumas found the incident amusing—a good story to tell to his friends. It is quite the lower Bohemianism—the Bohemianism to expose which Daudet wrote his "Sapho."

The disorder of the establishment was aggravated by the fact that Fanny Gordosa was a bad housekeeper, and when not quarrelling with M. Pifteau's mistress quarrelled with her servants and dismissed them. As a rule she dismissed only two of them at a time; but, one Saturday, on the eve of a big luncheon party, she dismissed all three of them, and discovered, on the Sunday morning, that there was hardly any food in the house.

Something had to be done, and Dumas rose to the occasion with an energy which suggests a renewal of youth.

It was the custom, as he knew, of some of the guests to come with provender in their pockets—ham, sausages and other delicacies—to supplement the fare on his table. He commandeered what they had brought. He ransacked the larder, in which he discovered nothing but rice and tomatoes; but with these viands, while Fanny laid the table, he compounded a dish which was pronounced excellent.

Such was his life throughout the summer of 1864. He lived, for some time, a very similar life after his return to Paris in the autumn. Fanny Gordosa was still with him, and was still imperious and capricious, and still insisted upon his offering hospitality to all her musical friends and acquaintances. "She is odd, but she has a good heart," he said, feeling, it would seem, that his submission to her tyranny needed an explanation, if not an excuse. But that *liaison* presently came to an end, though it is uncertain whether he drove Fanny out in one of his fits of tempestuous passion or whether she quitted him of her own free will, as the rats quit the sinking ship.

At all events she went, and her departure made a difference.

One knows, indeed, nothing to her credit. It is evident that she was a loose woman, and there is no evidence that she was either amiable or accomplished. But she did at least, in her fitful way, exercise authority and keep a certain modicum of order in the disorderly establishment, holding other loose women at bay in the interest of her own monopoly. After she had gone, there was no longer any pretence at order. Dumas was then neglected by his servants and unprotected by any member of his family. The door was always open to any

loose women who cared to enter it. Numbers of them poured through it and were made welcome, and plundered the host who had welcomed them, emptying the bowl in which he kept his ready money, and carrying off any little articles which pleased them as souvenirs.

One *liaison* belonging to this period was a good deal talked about: that with Adah Isaacs Menken.

She needs no introduction. All the world knows her as the accomplished circus rider who had had almost as many husbands as the Woman of Samaria and whose physical charms were supplemented by a literary talent which gained her admission to literary circles in both France and England—the woman whose charms are said to have inspired Swinburne's rhapsodical contrast between the "lilies and languors of virtue" and the "raptures and roses of vice," and the outcome of whose intimacy with Swinburne is said to have formed the subject of a remarkable wager between William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

She was thirty-three when she came to Paris. She knew Dumas, of course, as everybody did, by reputation. "When I arrive in Paris," she is said to have said before starting, "I mean to become the mistress of that amazing man." When she saw him coming out of a theatre and recognized him, she did not wait for an introduction, but threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

It was a way of beginning an acquaintance which always appealed to him. His acquaintance with his wife had begun like that. So had his acquaintance with Marie Dorval; and his spirited narrative of his travels in Russia tells us how he himself took the initiative in

similarly inaugurating a friendship which he formed with a lady who kept a shop in Astrakhan.

He was looking, in that benighted place, for some one with whom it would be possible for him to talk French. He saw a French name—Adelaïde Sérieux—over the door of a linen draper's shop. He inferred from the grace and smile of the lady who advanced to ask him what article he required that she was a Parisian. He leant across the counter, took her in his arms, and kissed her, and then told her who he was. She was so pleased and flattered at receiving such an attention from so celebrated a man that she called her husband to tell him what had happened; and he, on his part, was so pleased and flattered by the compliment that he invited Dumas to join him and his wife at dinner in the little parlour behind the shop—an invitation which he accepted on condition that he should himself be allowed to cook the repast.

It is a pretty story, but it has no known sequel. Adah Isaacs Menken's impetuous embrace had a sequel. Not only were she and Dumas seen everywhere together, they were also photographed together—he in his shirt sleeves, and she in the scanty costume in which she played "Mazeppa," seated on his knee; and copies of the photograph were exposed for sale in innumerable shop windows. The story might have been longer and richer in incident if Adah Isaacs Menken had not, very soon afterwards, met her death in a circus accident.

Possibly, too—but one cannot be sure—it is at this period that one should place the story of Dumas' achievement as a hypnotist. It was, at any rate, at this period that he told the story across the dinner table.

"Once," he said, "when I was staying with Lady H—— in her country house, and was thinking, after I had gone to bed, how glad I should be to see her, I saw her enter, attracted to me by the power of suggestion.

"She seemed to be fast asleep. Like a gentleman, I conducted her back to her own apartment, three nights running, pointing out to her that there is a limit to everything. But when she came again for the fourth time—well, then I did not think it necessary to escort her back any more."

One feels obliged to ask oneself why his daughter Marie, who came to live with her father at this period, and who was nearly forty, failed to moderate his eccentricities and winnow the company he kept; but that is a question to which one can only guess the answer.

Marie was a queer creature, though clever. She had made a very unsatisfactory marriage—her husband, one Pétel, is said to have shouted the offensive word "vache" at her, for some inadequate reason, on the morning after the wedding night. She had left him to live in a convent, where she learnt to illuminate missals; but she had emerged from the convent to write a novel in which she spoke of convent life as "the only kind of suicide which religious people approve of." She was accustomed, on festive occasions, to wear mistletoe in her hair—a practice which does certainly suggest an Abode of Love rather than a nunnery.

In her way, and up to a point, she was pious. She has been loosely described as a theosophist; and she ran after abbés, unless it was the abbés who ran after her—a habit which caused her father to grumble, and to attribute the increasing loneliness of his last years to the fact

that his son had become too respectable and his daughter too religious to associate with him. Perhaps her influence over him waned for that reason, and she kept out of his way because he could be so terrible when roused. Yet, even so, it strikes one as strange that she did so little, if, indeed, she did anything, to discipline Dumas' servants and protect his wardrobe from their depredations.

For that needed doing; and the need was the greater because, even at the nadir of his Bohemianism, Dumas still had some respectable friends, and there were even a few respectable ladies who occasionally called, for the sake of old times, to see how he was getting on.

Mme Shaw, the daughter of Schoebel, the Oriental scholar, was such a one. Dumas, who knew her father well, and had stayed in his house, had patted her on the head and given her sweets, when she was a child. Her parents occasionally sent her on some errand to him; and she liked going because she was fond of him, in spite of his faults; but her visits landed her, more than once, in an embarrassing situation.

There was the time when, as soon as the door was opened, she heard the voice of Fanny Gordosa shouting to the servant who was about to admit her: "Who's that? A woman? Tell her to go away. Dumas can't be bothered with any more women." There was the time when she was shown into Fanny's room, instead of Dumas', and found Fanny, whom she hardly knew, occupied with details of her toilet too intimate to be particularised—and that though she had called in response to an invitation to dinner. There was the time when she found brazen hussies rummaging in Dumas' drawers in

quest of twenty-franc pieces. There was an occasion still more remarkable.

Dumas had written to tell her that Fanny Gordosa's reign was over and that his daughter was now living with him. He had enclosed what he described as a passport: a scrap of paper on which he had written and signed the words: "Always to be admitted." His letter had ended with the postscript: "I am now *rangé*, as you will see." She called, shortly afterwards, in the morning; and the servant who received her, having examined the passport, pointed to a closed door, and said simply: "He is in there." She knocked at the door and a cheerful voice called to her to come in. The rest must be told in her own words:

"I opened the door, and, before I had recovered sufficiently from my astonishment to shut it again, I saw this: the author of "Monte Cristo" dressed, as I had once before seen him, in red tights, lying back in a deep arm-chair in the middle of his library.

"A young woman, of whom I got only a back view, was seated, half on his shoulder and half on the back of the chair. Another, equally young, whose face I saw, had established herself on one of the arms of the chair; a third was sitting on a rug at Dumas' feet.

"I recognized two of them. All three of them, in scorn of the notions of contemporary civilisation, were attired in the costume which Eve wore before sin came into the world.

"I closed the door again, without speaking a word, and then I heard Dumas calling to me, half in sorrow, half in anger:

"Come in, my child, come in. The ladies have gone

into the dressing-room. You mustn't be such a silly prude."

Naturally she did not go in, but went away; and the next morning she received a letter of apology:

"You know me very well, my child, and you really ought to have treated your old friend with more consideration. However, I am very sorry for what happened and prevented me from seeing you. In six days' time it will be my birthday. May I call on you then, and beg your pardon?"

He was allowed to call, though one suspects that Mathilde's father, who assented to the invitation, had not been told the full story of her experiences; and she even, after an interval, paid him another visit, and the condition in which she then found him, and the service which she then rendered him, give us a graphic picture of the way of life to which the neglect of those about him and his own casual habits had brought him.

She found the door of the apartment wide open. Nobody answered her knock, so she walked in. All the servants had gone out, leaving Dumas alone, ill in bed. He was wanting some tea, and the kitchen fire had gone out. She went into the kitchen, lighted the fire, made the tea and brought it to him. Then he told her that, ill as he was, he wanted to get up and go to an evening party at one of the Paris Embassies. She told him that he was not fit to go, but he insisted and begged her to go to the chest of drawers and take out his evening clothes for him. She pulled the drawers open, one after the other, and found in them only "four dirty night shirts, a black waistcoat, a pair of flannel drawers, and a red tie."

"Go to the desk and get some money out of it," he then said; and she went to the desk and had to report that it was empty.

"Have you any money that you can lend me?" he next asked.

"Yes. How much do you want?"

"The price of a shirt. I want you to take a carriage, drive to a shop and buy me one; and whatever you do, don't come back without a shirt of some sort."

She hurried off; but there were two difficulties. The hour was late, and most of the shops were shut. Dumas was so big a man that no ordinary shirt would fit him. The only discoverable shirt large enough for him was a fancy shirt which some other Colossus had worn at a fancy dress ball: a shirt decorated with a design of red devils pitchforking lost souls into yellow flames. She brought it back with her, *faute de mieux*, and Dumas after a brief explosion of anger, decided to put that strange shirt on and wear it at the Ambassador's reception.

"A few days later," Mme Shaw writes, "I received a note from him: 'My child, you must make haste and come and see me. I have a lot of things to tell you.'

"I found him radiantly happy, and, as I could not understand what he was so excited about, he explained:

" 'It is incredible, but it is a fact that my costume was a great success. People took it for a new idea of my own, though you know very well that it was nothing of the kind. They crowded round me, and made much of me; and I really believe that coloured shirts will now become fashionable for evening wear.'

"I did not remind him of the pattern on his coloured shirt, but I asked:

" 'How about the red tie?'

" 'That, too, was a great success. People supposed that I was wearing it as a souvenir of my friendship for Garibaldi; and I spent a perfectly delightful evening.' "

It must have been one of the last of his happy evenings; for the clouds were now gathering and his financial position was going from bad to worse.

CHAPTER XVII

DUMAS made his last success at the theatre in 1864 when "Les Mohicans de Paris" was produced at the Gaîté. Then, at the end of his career, as at the beginning of it, he found the censor of plays couching, like a lion in his path; and the story of his bearding of that lion gives us our last glimpse of him as the defiant and triumphant man of letters, insisting upon his genius and resenting the wrong done him with the air of the fighter who throws his hat into the ring, and, as the Americans say, "getting away with it."

He appealed unto Cæsar—wrote, that is to say, to Napoleon III.

There had been a time, as we have seen, when he had patronised Napoleon, telling his mother to tell him what steps he had better take if he wanted to become Emperor. He had been one of Napoleon's visitors at the time of his imprisonment at Ham. He had paid his respects to Napoleon at the Elysée. It was Napoleon's turn, he felt, to do something for him; and he did not hesitate to say so, or to point out to Napoleon that the latest victim of the censor's caprices and oppressions was a man of genius and illustrious.

"Sire," he began, "there were in 1830, and there still are, three commanding figures in French literature.

"These three men are: Victor Hugo, Lamartine and myself.

"To-day, Victor Hugo is an outlaw and Lamartine is a ruined man.

"I cannot be outlawed like Hugo: nothing in my life or in my writings furnishes any excuse for that.

"But I can be ruined, like Lamartine; and steps are now being taken to ruin me."

He went into details.

He had written and published, he said, twelve hundred volumes. They might be inferior to the works of Hugo and Lamartine; but they were more popular. They had been translated into all the civilised languages and read in every corner of the civilised globe. They were neither seditious nor immoral. He had written no line which might not safely be read by a Republican workman of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, or by a schoolgirl of the aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain. But the censorship seemed to regard him as the most immoral of all writers, since it had forbidden the production, or revival, of quite a number of his works, and so imposed on him a loss of at least £20,000.

"I appeal, therefore," he concluded, "for the first time, and probably for the last, to the Prince whose hand I have had the honour of shaking at Arenenberg, at Ham, and at the Elysée, and who, though he has often met me as a devoted disciple in exile and in prison, has never found me soliciting favours in the imperial Court."

It was a fine piece of bombast, not too shamelessly inaccurate; and Dumas, as has been said, "got away with it." The Emperor gave the word, and the censorship was lifted. "Les Mohicans de Paris" had a fairly long run, and made £1,200 for the theatre and a substantial

sum for the author. But all Dumas' subsequent dramatic enterprises were failures.

The story of his appeal for subscribers to support a new Théâtre historique has already been told. He lost nothing then except what he spent in sending out circulars, though it must have been painful to him to learn that his name had no longer its old magnetic power. A more disastrous enterprise—more disastrous because it was actually launched—was that of the so-called Grand Théâtre Parisien.

That theatre was a ramshackle hall which Dumas found untenanted in the slums in the neighbourhood of the Gare de Lyon. It occurred to him that money might be made by producing popular plays there; and he made the experiment—but not in his own name, having learnt to be nervous of financial responsibilities.

His nominee was a retired non-commissioned officer whom he wished to help because he came, or said that he came, from Villers-Cotterets.

This associate's qualifications are said to have been those of a "chucker-out" rather than a director, and his probity was at least questionable. The details cannot be ascertained. Dumas himself never understood why the adventure, which began well and looked promising, ended in financial failure. But the failure was complete. Dumas "found," a biographer writes, "that he owed every one of the company twenty pounds or more and had not the means of paying them"; and even the secretary, whose dishonesty he believed to have been the cause of his discomfiture, put in a claim.

The man had borrowed Dumas' watch—a magnificent jewelled watch, the gift of the Duc d'Orléans; and he

did not return it. At last Dumas reminded him of the loan, and his answer was: "The watch I borrowed? I did not borrow your watch. You gave it to me because my salary was in arrears, and I am going to keep it."

He kept it; and Dumas was obliged to call a meeting of the company, admit his inability to discharge his obligations to them, and suggest that they should try to recoup themselves for their losses by performing his play in the provinces where his name was still a name to conjure with.

They did so—there was, indeed, nothing else for them to do. He promised to come and see them whenever they were playing near Paris and allow his appearance in the stage box to be announced as a part of the show; and he kept his promise with results advantageous to the box office. At Villers-Cotterets, indeed, the success was so great that Dumas went behind the scenes, shook hands with the actors, kissed the actresses—though he never felt the need of any special excuse for doing that—and invited them all to lunch with him the next day at the hotel, undertaking to cook the lunch himself. Jules Ferry writes:

"He kept his word. On the following morning he took up his position in front of the kitchen range at the hotel and proceeded to prepare a succulent luncheon for the interpreters of his work, paying such attention to atmosphere and local colour that he put on the chef's white cap and girt himself with the chef's apron.

"The dining-room was on the ground floor, and opened on the street. For two hours the people of Villers-Cotterets stood outside, flattening their noses against

the windows and watching Dumas in his apron, setting food before the artists."

A characteristic exhibition, no doubt, but not exactly the triumphant return to his birthplace which a man of genius would look forward to as the crown and climax of a glorious career. It contrasts rather painfully with the scene on the day when "Antony" took the Paris stage by storm and the enthusiasts tore the tails off the author's coat to carry away as souvenirs.

Similar contrasts abound. Dumas was losing his vogue in the newspaper offices as well as in the theatres; and there is no denying that he helped to depreciate the value of his signature by his unscrupulous shifts. He would undertake to supply a feuilleton, but would neither write it himself nor instruct a secretary to write it for him, merely copying something from a book, adding a line of introduction, and putting his name to it. The publication of one of his serials was suspended because he had lost his way in the story and sent in instalment after instalment consisting merely of a long extract from some old volume of Memoirs. De Villemessant of the *Figaro* tells a story of this casual habit of his.

He had promised De Villemessant a *causerie* on the unlikely subject of "Serpents." De Villemessant had hesitated, but had ended by accepting the proposal on the ground that "you never knew with Dumas—it was quite possible that he might have got hold of something interesting." The first *causerie* began as follows: "I take the following from my good friend Dr. Révoil." Then came the excerpt, and then: "The next *causerie* will deal with boa constrictors, the most interesting of all serpents. Alex. Dumas."

The second instalment was not required; but it seems to have been paid for. De Villemessant has published two telegrams on the subject which he received: first, "Please send 400 francs to my house; many thanks. . . A. Dumas." And then, an hour later: "I meant 600 francs, my friend, not 400. A. Dumas."

Thus money, now and again, came dropping in; and it must be added that, now and again, Dumas still did a good piece of work. There was good work in "La Terreur Prussienne,"—the book in which he gave an account of a visit to Germany after Sadowa. He predicted in it the Prussian bid for European hegemony, and wrote: "No one who has not travelled in Prussia has the faintest conception of the hatred which the Prussians entertain for us." But no one took any notice. Dumas, when he intruded in the domain of political philosophy, was regarded by the political philosophers, not as a seer, but as a gas bag; and no doubt his political philosophy was mainly guess-work, though he sometimes happened to guess right.

Lecturing was another of his enterprises at this period. A lecture on Delacroix, which he was pressed to give, revealed his talents to him. No doubt he was admirable as a lecturer—he certainly was popular. He lectured a good deal in the provinces—at Rouen and Havre and elsewhere—with great success. But there is little money in lecturing—there was less in it then than there is now; and Dumas never returned from a lecturing tour with more than a few louis in his pocket. The major portion of his gains, such as they were, were spent in entertaining his admirers at lunch and showing them how good a cook he was. If it ever became known that there was

money in the house, whether from that source or from any other, the parasites came in swarms for their share of it: needy men who borrowed, and light-fingered women who went through their host's pockets.

Secretaries and collaborators were no longer as easy to come by as of old. Those of them who were competent preferred, like Maquet, to leave Dumas and make money for themselves. The others did little for him except run his errands when he wanted accommodation from publishers and pawnbrokers. His most faithful secretary in these last years was a young woman, known as Valentine; and it seems that now, at the end of his days, Dumas succeeded in enjoying a young woman's society without making amorous advances to her. He stuffed sweatmeats into Valentine's mouth while she sat at his feet, writing at his dictation. It is uncertain whether she ever received any more substantial reward for her labours.

His son helped him from time to time. He was always willing to help when asked to; but he was the last person in the world to whom Dumas liked to apply for help. He had come to be rather jealous of the son of whom he had once been so proud: the son whose literary work was now in more demand than his own, who had been saving money while he had been squandering it, and had a landed estate, investments and a bank account. He resented his son's habit of lecturing him on his irregularities and eccentricities; and he concealed his necessities from him and kept out of his way.

"I never meet him nowadays," he said to a friend, "except at funerals. I dare say I shan't meet him again until I meet him at my own."

Presently, in the late 'sixties, his health began to fail; and it was evident to everyone that the constitution with which he had taken such liberties was breaking up. Nothing definite was the matter; or, at all events, nothing definite was diagnosed. It was noticed merely that he was absurdly fat, and not only indolent, but drowsy. He took to going to bed early and getting up late. He fell asleep in his stall when he went to the theatre. He sat for hours in a half comatose condition in his armchair.

It was premature old age—a disease for which there is no remedy. A modern physician would, no doubt, have spoken of arterio-sclerosis and predicted the "stroke" which eventually occurred. His own doctors, not knowing what our modern doctors know about blood pressure, could do nothing for him except recommend change of air. In the summer of 1869 they sent him to Roscoff in Brittany. In the spring of 1870 they sent him to the Riviera. The benefit which he derived from these visits was short-lived and illusory. He returned from the South of France when he heard of the outbreak of that war with Germany which he had foretold, feeble, bloated, dropsical, and with the menace of apoplexy hanging over him. His son and daughter came to the conclusion that they must take charge of him, whether he would or not; and they carried him off to the former's villa, at Puy, near Dieppe.

"My boy," he said, "you are taking me home to die"; and it was, in fact, only a question of a few weeks.

They humoured him, and he was gentle. They put money in a drawer for him to look at, and told him it was his own, so that he might not feel that he was a pauper and dependent on them. They assured him,

when he expressed a doubt, that his literary work was, indeed, a monument more enduring than brass, solidly based as the pyramids of Egypt and towering to a loftier elevation. They hid the news of the German victories from him. They asked him if he wanted to get to work again, and he shook his head and smiled, and said that he preferred, for once in his life, to be lazy. They brought his grandchildren to play with him; and they fetched a priest to his bedside, knowing that, though he had never been religious, he had always been superstitious. He was, indeed, at the last, as good and quiet and subdued as Uncle Tom in his Cabin.

And so the end came peacefully, while the Germans were occupying Dieppe: the end of a life in which there had been more of drama than in the most dramatic of his writings.

For his life was a real drama which has lost none of its significance through the lapse of time: a drama presenting the true story of a titanic conflict. On the one hand we see, when we examine it, the man of genius defying all the conventional decencies of the social order and trusting to genius, unsupported by any force of character, to pull him through; on the other hand we have the patient, untiring social forces biding their time and taking their terrible revenge.

The collapse has been compared to the breaking up of an Empire; and the story is like the story of Napoleon transferred to the field of literary and social life. The works have survived the wreck, as the Code Napoléon has survived it; but the man, in each case, went under because he aspired to "make circumstances" instead of seizing them.

His son was loyal to his memory, and revered his genius. He likened the disparagement of his works by critics of the highbrow order to the insignificant attempt to pollute a mighty river with a handful of filth. But he did not follow the example of his life—he profited from it. He had picked up the torch, to continue the race, from his father's failing hands, holding it steadily instead of brandishing it; but his rôle, as we shall now see, was not to popularise or amuse, though he could be both amusing and popular. His mother's as well as his father's influence was to count. Thanks to her influence, and her white blood, he had already "ranged himself," and saw himself as a man with a mission, brought into the world to preach.

CHAPTER XVIII

DUMAS the Younger very obviously inherited, together with his prodigal father's literary tastes and talents, his domesticated mother's prudent character and instinctive preference for an unadventurous bourgeois life. He began life, it is true, by showing some disposition to follow his father's bad example—he could hardly, in the circumstances, have done otherwise; but his mother's sobering influence drew him back before he had followed it too far. And that, no doubt, is how it came about that, after sighing sentimentally at the feet of one Magdalen in his youth, he was able, in middle age, to talk to another Magdalen in the wise and weighty language of one of the heavy fathers in one of his own virtuous plays, as we shall presently see him doing.

We have met his mother—Catherine Lebay—already. We have seen how Dumas the Elder made her acquaintance as a fellow-lodger and, considering economy for the one and only time in his extravagant career, persuaded her—she having a frugal mind—that one apartment would be large enough for both of them. A point to insist upon, however, is that she was not, as careless biographers have sometimes represented, a humble workgirl. She had made herself, when Dumas met her, a modest position in the world as a dressmaker, with other women working under her. When he left her to her own devices, she was able to obtain and hold a

post as matron in a convent school. If he had married her when he was a junior clerk in the Duc d'Orléans' office, it would have been an exaggeration to call his marriage a *mésalliance*.

Possibly she already had a husband somewhere in the background. The statement has been made, but on very dubious authority. The probability is that Dumas did not marry her because he did not want to—because she was ten years his senior, uneducated, quite uninterested in the things which were beginning to interest him, and, therefore, no fit wife for a rising young dramatic author on familiar terms with eminent actors and actresses. Though doubtless a better woman than these ladies, she could not have held her own in their world; and the day soon came when the son whom she had borne to Dumas was her only link with him.

He ceased to live with her when he brought his mother to Paris; and he can then have contributed little, if, indeed, he contributed anything, to her support, seeing that his income was only three-and-sixpence a day. Both she and the boy must have lived mainly on her salary and the earnings of her needle. For the boy's sake, however —and because the idea of paternity always tickled his vanity—he kept in touch with her after he had ceased to be faithful to her; and when fortune began to smile, he not only "recognized" the child whom he proudly styled his "Duc de Chartres," but took a small apartment at Passy for the unmarried mother.

She wanted to keep the child; he wanted to take it away; there was a lawsuit. Dumas won his case, and then abandoned his claim—absorbed, one conjectures, by his interest in other women—and the boy was left

with his mother until he was old enough to be sent to school. It is said that he hid under her bed, hoping to avoid that fate, and had to be seized by the leg and pulled out of his hiding-place.

His ultimate relations with his father were, as we have seen, not merely correct, but affectionate, though paternal rather than filial. He lectured him about his weaknesses, but smiled indulgently at them, and when he fell came forward to break the fall. He spoke of him then as "a big baby whom I had when I was young." But he never loved him as he loved his mother; and it would be hard to say whether he resented more indignantly his father's treatment of his mother or the resulting stigma of his own illegitimacy. One finds in his writings—chiefly in the prefaces to the collected editions of his plays—a number of bitter references to both these wrongs. He did not wait for his father's death in order to print what he thought about them. His whole attitude towards life was coloured by them.

"For my part," he wrote in the Preface to "Le Fils Naturel," "I hold that a man who deliberately brings a child into the world (and he cannot do this otherwise than deliberately) without assuring its moral and social wellbeing, and without recognizing his responsibility for the subsequent trouble which his action may cause, is a malefactor who ought to be classed somewhere between thieves and murderers."

He published that bitter cry in the last year of his father's life. A couple of years or so after his father's death he published more to the same effect in the Preface to "La Femme de Claude," and there referred his readers to "L'Affaire Clemenceau"—a novel which he

had written quite early in life—for further and better particulars.

In the main that romance is an absurd and fantastic composition; but its earlier pages are realistic and autobiographical. They give us what the writer himself declares to be a faithful and accurate description of his life in the boarding-school kept by a M. Goubeaux, who was one of his father's collaborators; and the essence of the story is that his condition as a "natural" son exposed him to the derision of his schoolfellows. Readers who want the details may seek them in the novel. Here it may suffice to quote the summary of the case contained in the letter to M. Cuvillier-Fleury, printed in reply to some criticism as the Preface to "La Femme de Claude."

That Preface was written as a plea for what the French law calls "la recherche de la paternité." It begins with a bitter statement of the writer's own position, and a bitter denunciation of the law which "had allowed my father to bring me into the world, but had also left him free, when the thing was done, to abandon me, physically, socially and morally." It proceeds to relate how his mother, left to her own devices, and thrown upon her own resources, did her best for him, and how his father, "without wishing to accept the full consequences of paternity, preferred not to repudiate them altogether" and, therefore, "when, after his first successes at the theatre, he felt that his future was secure, recognized me and gave me his name." It then describes how, in spite of that recognition, he suffered at the hands of the young barbarians at the school:

"These boys used to insult me from morning till night, delighted, probably, to depreciate in my person, because

my mother did not bear it, the illustrious name which my father was making for himself. A day never passed without my having to fight one of them, and there were days on which I had to fight several of them. . . . My torments which I have described in 'L'Affaire Clemenceau,' and of which I never spoke to my mother, for fear of wounding her feelings, lasted for five or six years. They nearly killed me. I was not growing—I was wasting away. I was equally indifferent to my studies and my games. But I became self-centred and acquired those habits of reflection and observation which were sure, some day, if I survived, to be my stay and support."

An overdrawn picture, no doubt. Either the young Dumas did not punch as many heads as he tells us that he punched as thoroughly as he tells us that he punched them, or else he was not bullied and sneered at as persistently as he represents. The adequate punching of a sufficient number of heads is a specific in such cases in all schools. But we may take it as true that things happened which made him feel that the sons of unmarried mothers stood on a different social footing from the sons who were born in wedlock, and that the sense of inferiority thus imparted was the first influence which shaped his outlook on life.

We may take it, too, that the school was a bad one—not only because it is impossible to picture a good school conducted by one of Dumas the Elder's boon companions, but also because the boy, even after his removal to a better school, was not thought advanced enough to enter for the *bachot*,—an examination which roughly corresponds to our "London matric." His final school was the Collège Bourbon—a day school which he

attended while living in the Pension Hénon; and there, he tells us, he recovered both physical health and moral equilibrium, and acquired the desire to amuse himself and "see life."

And in that, of course, he was normal, seeing that adolescence almost invariably brings an outburst of high spirits, even to grave young men, especially when there is plenty of money about, as there was, for a while, in this case.

The Elder Dumas' "Monte Cristo" period was beginning when the boy left school. He was a new toy for the father who had neglected him as a child. His father was not only able, but eager, to introduce him to a joyous way of life in salient contrast with the dull domesticity of his mother's small apartment and to let him dip his hand freely into that bowl on the mantelpiece in which he kept his ready money. Naturally he availed himself of his opportunities. If he did not forgive his father for treating his mother badly, at least he made excuses for him, and lived, for a time, as his father's rather than his mother's son.

His father, he says—the quotation is from the Preface of "La Femme de Claude"—"tried to make up, by the goodness of his heart, for his neglect of the full obligations of paternity. I became," he continues, "his best friend." He gives us this picture of the new life into which he was launched:

"This prodigious man was able to find repose from one fatigue by tiring himself in some other way. When he had done too much work, he used to go shooting for three or four days, or dancing for three or four nights, sleeping in the carriages in which he drove to the

shooting party or the ball. When I was eighteen, his exuberance took charge of my youth and my curiosity, and we set out together in quest of amusement in society —in all kinds of society. Shocking, wasn't it? But one can observe and store up experiences everywhere; and it may be that we found a richer field of observation and experience in the resorts in which we diverted ourselves than we should have found in any ponderous philosophical tomes."

And that is true. It may not be true as a general proposition; but it is certainly true of the particular case of Dumas the Younger. Dissipation was, in his case, a part—a very important and profitable part—of education; and this peculiar education of his served him in two ways. As a teacher, a preacher, and a moral force—and he lived to specialise in morality almost as Uriah Heap specialised in humility—he was the outcome of a reaction. He lived to become rich, respectable and virtuous because he had, thanks to his mother's training, sense enough to profit from the warning of his father's horrible example—because he had "walked in the way of sinners" and seen whither it led. But it is also certain that, if he had never followed that example, and never walked in that way, he would never have written the one work which made him famous and still keeps his memory alive.

He confesses—one might almost say that he boasts—that he did not walk in the way of sinners merely as a spectator or as his father's companion.

"It is true," he writes, "that I did not live exactly like a saint, unless we take for our standard of sanctity the early manner of Saint Augustine who, when Saint Ambrose converted him to a godly life, was living with a

concubine whom he then turned out of his house, retaining the child which she had borne him, instead of marrying the mother and legitimising the child, which would have been more in accordance with the precepts of morality and the Church."

But he adds, after moralising at the expense of Saint Augustine, that if he himself was more sinner than saint, he was more philosopher than either:

"Behold me launched at full speed in what I propose to call the paganism of modern life. But let me tell you the truth. These facile pleasures gave me very little enjoyment. While living this riotous life, I was far more occupied in observing and taking notes than in enjoying myself. The lost sheep whom I was constantly meeting, who sold pleasure to some men and gave it to others, keeping for themselves nothing except certain shame, inevitable ignominy and precarious good fortune, disposed me to tears rather than to laughter, and I began to ask myself why that was so.

"As I had no wealth that I could squander on these women, I permitted myself to add a little pity to such expenses as I could afford. I listened to their stories of their despair. I received their confidences. I saw the sincere and bitter tears which they shed in the midst of their illusory delights. Those of them who took me for their confidant were grateful to me because I did not despise them or laugh at them, with the result that my soul awoke and I discovered a new ego in my breast."

And so, at the age of twenty-one, he wrote that famous work—equally famous as a novel and as a play: "La Dame aux Camélias."

CHAPTER XIX

"LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS" is, as everybody knows, the pathetic story of a courtesan who died of consumption at the age of twenty-three.

"Nothing was further from my intention," Dumas wrote in later years, "than to glorify courtesans"; and of that charge he may fairly be acquitted. He was only sentimental about them, as George Gissing was, at a later date, in "The Unclassed," about their humbler sisters, the prostitutes, and specially sentimental about one particular courtesan, whose case he declared to be exceptional because she had "heart."

In the end—when the time came to write a Preface—he not only sentimentalised, but moralised. He did not, indeed, even then, glorify courtesans, but he did see them and show them to his readers, through rose-coloured glasses, as the helpless victims of the social system which they had exploited—innocent lambs in comparison with the girls of superior social standing who married for money and the women of superior social standing who tired of their husbands and sought relief in extra-matrimonial adventure. He wrote, in the white heat of his passion, as if all the women of the world belonged to one or other of these classes.

He went even further than that. France, he declared, when he let himself go, was fast drifting towards universal prostitution. Rigorous measures must instantly be

taken if she was to be saved from that catastrophe. All young women who could not prove that they had private means must be conscripted and taught a trade in State workshops. If recalcitrant, they must be placed under police supervision, and if they lapsed from virtue they must be deported to colonies "where the colonists need wives and the land needs labour for its cultivation." Men must be dealt with even more severely:

"The law, in recognizing that a man of one-and-twenty is free, has also recognized that he is responsible for his actions. Any man of one-and-twenty, therefore, who can be shown to have had intimate relations with a virgin, should be required to give the girl a capital sum or an income calculated in accordance with his own position in life. If he cannot afford any such payment, he should be liable to five years' imprisonment. If he has made the girl a mother, and has refused to marry her, he should be liable to ten years' imprisonment. . . . Every natural child whose father has succeeded in evading his obligations, and whose mother has brought him up honestly by her labour, at her own expense, should be exempted from the obligation of military service."

A remarkable programme truly: the more remarkable because its originator was no Saint Antony, who had successfully resisted the most embarrassing temptations, but a man of the world who had not only succumbed to a good many temptations in his time, but had more than once gone out of his way to look for temptations to which to succumb.

One need not take it seriously. If one did, one would have to ask, among other questions, what the poor

colonists had done to deserve worthless wives who had lapsed from virtue, or why it should be assumed that all illegitimate sons objected to military service. But it is interesting alike as a further proof that Dumas could never bring himself to forgive his father for not marrying his mother and as an unusual outcome of an "affair" with a prominent figure in "la haute galanterie."

For there had been such an "affair," and there was no mystery about it. All Paris knew, when "La Dame aux Camélias" appeared, that the story of Marguérite Gauthier was based on the story of the notorious courtesan, Marie Duplessis. All Paris also knew that its author had been something more than a sympathetic observer or dispassionate critic of her triumphs and misfortunes. He admitted as much in his Preface to the play, and hinted at more than he admitted. The gaps in his narrative can easily be filled from other sources.

The actual facts of the story are, indeed, in rather sharp contrast with the tone of the Preface; but that inconsistency is easy to explain.

The Dumas of the adventure in gallantry was a young man about town. The Dumas of the Preface was a middle-aged and moralised Dumas—so highly moralised that one can almost picture him describing himself as "the most moral person going": a Dumas who saw himself as a crusader, and whose severe manner suggests W. T. Stead denouncing the evil men who exacted the Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.

But this moralised Dumas was neither a penitent nor a hypocrite. He regarded his experiences as an asset and his recollections of "unregenerate days" as a valuable part of a preacher's equipment. He really felt that it was

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only because he had been a Don Juan in his youth that he was likely to be a competent crusader in middle life. Consequently he saw no reason for repenting in sackcloth and ashes of his early triumphs in gallantry, but could review them with perfect self-complacency in the very act of drawing the important moral which they contained.

Here, slightly abbreviated, is his own version of the opening scene of his romance:

"On a fine day in September, 1844, I had been to Saint-Germain-en-Laye to see my father. On my way there I had met Eugène Déjazet, the son of the famous actress. We had ridden together in the beautiful forest of Saint-Germain, and returned to Paris for dinner, and gone to the Variétés, and were seated in the stalls. Marie Duplessis was in the stage box on the right-hand side.

"She was alone there, or rather, she was the only person whom one could see there, sniffing at a bouquet, nibbling sweets from a bag, hardly listening to the performance, looking about her in all directions, exchanging smiles and glances with three or four of our neighbours, leaning back, from time to time, to chat with an invisible occupant of her box, who was no other than the aged Russian Count S——.

"Marie Duplessis was flashing signals to a fat woman with a freckled face and a flashy costume who was in one of the boxes of the higher tier opposite to her. This good lady, sitting beside a pale young woman who seemed restless and ill at ease, and whom she had presumably undertaken to "launch" in the world of gallantry, was a certain Clémence Pr—t, a milliner, whose

establishment was in an apartment in the Boulevard de la Madeleine, in the house adjoining that in which Marie Duplessis occupied the mezzanine floor.

"Eugène Déjazet knew Mme Pr—t. Mme Pr—t knew Marie Duplessis, whom I was anxious to know, though I freely admit that I had not the faintest idea that my acquaintance with her was to influence my literary career. Eugène went over to talk to Mme Pr—t, who was a born go-between for such purposes; and it was agreed that we should go round to her flat after the play was over, and that if the Count said good-bye to Marie Duplessis at the door, instead of going in with her, she would allow us to pay her a short visit."

That is what Dumas wrote in the "comedian's edition" of his collected plays for the satisfaction of the curiosity of inquisitive people who wanted to know to what extent he was "the man of his book" and upon how solid a basis of fact the romance of "La Dame aux Camélias" was founded. The story which he there tells is a very credible story of a very ordinary adventure—such an adventure as would have been absolutely sure, some day or other, to befall a young man of his temperament and opportunities, living in a dissolute set, with a little money to burn, and a precocious anxiety to "see life."

It is obvious, however—it must have been obvious to every reader—that the story does not tell the whole truth. It provokes now, as it provoked when it was told, a good deal more curiosity than it gratifies, and leaves its readers wondering whether it had any sequel, and if so, what sequel—whether, and to what extent, Dumas played the part assigned to Armand Duval in the romance. It gives no account of Marie Duplessis, but takes her for

granted, as any French writer at that date naturally would, so that the next questions of every contemporary reader will be:

Who was this wonderful woman? What was her origin? What was her exact social status? How had she come to be what she was? Did Dumas depict her—did he even see her—as she really was? Was the woman over whose decline and fall he shed the profuse tears of sensibility in actual fact an "unfortunate," or would she be more correctly described as an "adventuress?"

We must trace the story of her early years in order to find the answers to these questions.

CHAPTER XX

AT the time when the young Dumas—a dandy, eager to "see life," wearing a gorgeous waistcoat festooned with gold chains, and carrying an elegant gold-headed cane—sought and made her acquaintance, Marie Duplessis was indisputably the Queen of the Half World. She had climbed to that height quickly, having started to climb early, from a very humble station in life.

Marie Duplessis was not, of course, her real name—the names by which the Queens of the Half World are known are never their real names. It was a *nom de guerre*, assumed, so to say, by instalments; her actual name, as the baptismal register proves, was Rose-Alphonsine Plessis. Her father was one Marin Plessis, a Norman, a pedlar by calling, of obscure origin and unpleasant reputation.

His mother was a certain Louise-Renée Plessis—a wandering light o' love who went, as it were, on circuit, selling her favours as she went. He was not quite sure who was his father—his mother probably could not have told him; but local rumour made him the son of a young Norman abbé called Louis Descours—an abbé whose gallantries were more obvious to his neighbours than his piety; and, if rumour spoke truly, there was blue blood, albeit somewhat diluted, in his and his daughter's veins. The fact, if it be a fact, helps to explain her social successes.

For the abbé belonged to a family of aristocrats who had come down in the world, sinking, by slow degrees, from the position of noblemen to that of small farmers. A daughter of the house—Anne du Mesnil—had completed the social descent by marrying a farm labourer. The abbé was her son. Marin Plessis, who is believed to have been his son, married Marie-Louise-Michelle Deshayes, whose acquaintance he made in the course of his travels as a hawker, in 1821, and then opened a small draper's shop at Nonant.

The shop was a failure and so was the marriage. The rights and wrongs of the case, which are disputed, are not worth enquiring into. All that is certain is that Mme Plessis left her husband and her children and entered the service of an English lady, Lady Anderson Yarborough, and that the two girls—Delphine and Alphonsine, presently to become Marie—were handed over to the care of a cousin who lived in the neighbourhood.

She was a poor uneducated woman, and had no time to look after them properly. Delphine, the elder child, seems to have been a good girl. Alphonsine was not. It was discovered, one day, that she had, as her biographer puts it, "left her virtue, together with her petticoat, underneath a bramble bush in a hedge." She was then bundled home to her father, who, instead of recalling her to the paths of propriety, decided to make money out of her precocious attractions. It is said that he sold her, or hired her out, to "a septuagenarian good-for-nothing." It is also said that he sold her to the gipsies; and there is a further story to the effect that he brought her to Paris and left her there in charge of some relatives of his who were in business in a small way as greengrocers. We

may guess, if we think it worth while, which of the stories is true—we certainly cannot find out. The one certainty is that she did come to Paris, at the age of fifteen —a pretty, but awkward, country girl, shabbily dressed and wearing wooden shoes. Her subsequent movement and adventures are easier to trace.

She began by working for her living in the humble calling of a dressmaker's trotter, and lived the life of a grisette in the Latin Quarter, dancing at the Bal Mabille and accepting the attentions and hospitality of students, who took her to suburban restaurants on Sundays. It was the life, relatively innocent, which most of the Parisian dressmakers' trotters were living at the time—most of them ready, at any time, if opportunity offered, either to marry and settle down to humdrum respectability or to accept the protection of any rich man in whose eyes they found favour.

Alphonsine, in that respect, was neither better nor worse than the others, but merely, as most of them would have thought, and as she herself doubtless thought, more fortunate. Her first chance came when she made the acquaintance of a well-to-do tradesman—a restaurateur of the Galerie Montpensier—who took her to Saint-Cloud and was so pleased with her that he established her in a small apartment in the rue de l'Arcade. That was the end of her life as a grisette—her first step on the ladder by which she was to climb to "haute galanterie." The opportunity of taking the next step seems to have occurred because the restaurateur boasted of his conquest and so aroused first the curiosity and then the envy of his aristocratic customers. They also sought the girl's acquaintance; and one of them—but

it is not quite certain which of them—very soon took her away from him. It was then, apparently—perhaps at her new protector's suggestion—that she took to calling herself Marie instead of Alphonsine and Duplessis instead of Plessis.

Nestor Roqueplan—a *viveur* of the period—has given us two interesting and convincing pictures of her appearance before and after her promotion:

"One evening I was coming up the first steps of the Pont Neuf. Boiling fat was bubbling fiercely in the frying-pan of a vendor of fried potatoes; and I saw standing in front of it, attracted, as it seemed, by a spectacle of supreme delight, a pretty girl, of delicate appearance and very dirty. She was munching a green apple which she did not seem to care about. Fried potatoes were what she wanted. I bought her a bag of them."

That is the picture of the chrysalis. There follows the picture of the moth which had emerged. It presents us to the Duc de Guiche—"a tall youth, fresh as a rose, fair and curly-headed like Cupid"—whom Roqueplan ran into at the Ranelagh dancing-hall:

"He had with him, hanging on his arm, a very charming lady, most elegantly dressed, who was no other than my little *gourmande* of the Pont Neuf. She was now known as Marie Duplessis. After having passed through all the preliminary stages of the career of gallantry, frequented very low-down places, and had many disreputable acquaintances, she had, at last, fallen into the hands of a man who was improving her."

A statement confirmed in the Memoirs of Gustave Claudin, who writes:

"After having wandered for a long time like a lost

sheep and frequented the most equivocal resorts, she had at last made the acquaintance of a nobleman who conceived a genuine passion for her."

This Duc de Guiche afterwards became Duc de Gramont. History knows him, under that later title, as the Foreign Minister who helped Empress Eugénie to hustle France into the Franco-German war. Whether it was really he who took Marie Duplessis away from her restaurateur, or whether another lover of distinction only a little less than his had intervened, is not quite certain. The honour of discovering her has also been claimed for Count Fernand de Monguyon, a notable member of the Jockey Club, described by the historian of that Society as "one of those who did most to give provincial parents the impression that the Jockey Club was the haunt of debauchees and that admission to it was tantamount to damnation." Gossip credits him with the exclamation:

"Think of it! I bought Marie Duplessis a carriage and a black spaniel; and here is the Duc de Guiche riding in the carriage and taking the dog for an airing. That's pretty rough. What had I better do about it?"

He was advised to do nothing, and he did nothing. Nor was there any particular reason—supposing the story to be true—why he should have done anything. Marie Duplessis never pretended to be—and it was not seriously expected that a woman in her position would be—exclusive in her affections. Gallantry was, in Paris, in those days a recognized profession. Those who followed it were known as "femmes entretenues."

Such women were no more expected to be satisfied with one lover than a physician is expected to be satisfied

with one patient or a solicitor to be satisfied with one client. They might have been, or they might eventually become, men's mistresses, or even, in rare cases, their wives. In the meantime, as "femmes entretenues," they lived, not "under the protection of a gentleman," but under the protection of several gentlemen at once; and sentiment entered so little into the matter that good manners forbade the various protectors of any such lady to be jealous of each other, but permitted them all to meet in her salon on the friendliest terms. According to De Villemessant of the *Figaro*, seven aristocratic admirers formed a syndicate to support Marie Duplessis in luxury, each being assigned a separate evening for the enjoyment of her society; and he further assures us that they symbolised their collective devotion by combining to present her with a magnificent dressing-table containing seven drawers.

The story may not be true—one always suspects such stories because they are so easy to invent; but it is a story which mirrors the customs of the time.

The "femme entretenue" was an institution. Her status was almost that of the "hetæræ" of ancient Greece. Young men of fashion frequented her salon and her alcove as a matter of course, pretty much as the bourgeois of Fécamp, in Maupassant's story, frequented the Maison Tellier. Her apartment combined the promiscuity of the "tolerated house" with the exclusiveness of a fashionable club. Admission was a highly valued—and therefore a costly—privilege. To be "on the list" of a fashionable "femme entretenue" was one of the hallmarks of social distinction; and the "femmes entretenues" themselves, knowing their value, and desiring to make the

most of their opportunities, negotiated with the applicants through agents such as Clémence Pr—t whom we have met, who ultimately served a term of imprisonment for "corruption of minors," and whom a contemporary gossip bluntly describes as Marie Duplessis' "courtier d'affaires" or business agent.

One need not moralise. One has no right to point the finger of scorn at France, for very similar social conditions prevailed in England in the days when Laura Bell was laying the foundations of the fortune which, having found religion, she devoted to pious and virtuous purposes, and also in those earlier days when Louis Napoleon and Alexander William Kinglake divided the favour of the Miss Howard whom the former, when he became an Emperor, made a Countess. One need not pause to face the disputed question whether these women fulfilled the function attributed by Cato the Censor to the prostitutes of Rome—that of protectors of the wives and daughters of men of noble lineage who might otherwise have become the prey of the seducer. It suffices to define their place in the world in order that the position occupied by the heroine of "La Dame aux Camélias," when Dumas met her, may be understood.

What sort of a woman was she? What was her secret? Was she a woman to whom he rightly ascribed the quality of "heart?" And, if not, how did he come to ascribe it to her?

The last of these questions is the easiest to answer. Dumas was a boy when he met Marie Duplessis. He fell in love with her, and she fell in love with him; and though a grown man may succumb to the charms of a woman of the lightest reputation and yet see her as she really is, a

boy never does so. His eyes are always blinded. He always regards her tenderness for him as a proof that she had "heart," and that though, from the point of view of a censorious world, she may be no better than she should be, she is, in actual fact, vastly better than she seems to be.

Beautiful Marie Duplessis certainly was. Everybody said so, and her portraits confirm what everybody said. She must also have had that indefinable quality called "charm," for beauty without charm quickly ceases to attract. There is abundant testimony that she dressed with exquisite taste and that her manners were pleasant, unassuming and self-possessed—a fact which supports the suggestion that there was blue blood in her veins. It was written of her that she "made vice decent, dignified and decorous"; and Roger de Beauvoir, who was one of her admirers, saw no reason why he should not take her to a party at which she would have met ladies belonging to the world which ladies of the half world were not expected to enter, and had to be warned that "though the ladies of our party are not exceptionally prudish, it is probable that they would not care to associate with Mlle Marie Duplessis."

It seems, further, that Marie was intelligent and not without accomplishments, the Duc de Guiche, or another, having improved her. She was fond of reading sentimental novels, and played the piano fairly well. Dumas the Elder wrote of her—perhaps to please his son—that she was "far superior to the calling which she followed"; and someone else once described her as "the most fascinating of all the foolish virgins." There was a consensus of opinion, in short, that she had many merits.

But heart? That is another matter. Unless we can discover "heart" in the story of her relations with Dumas, we shall not discover it at all. There certainly is no sign of it—there is, perhaps, some sign of the lack of it—in the stories alike of her relations with her wealthiest benefactor and with the man who married her.

The former was Count Stackelberg—a Russian nobleman, nearly eighty years of age. The story went that he met her at the baths of Bagnères, where she was staying for the benefit of her health when the symptoms of the phthisis of which she was to die first became noticeable, and that he was attracted to her because she was the very image of his own daughter who had just died of that disease. There is a version of the story in "La Dame aux Camélias":

"It seemed to him that God had thrown this woman in his path to console him for his sorrow. He went up to her, he took her by the hand, he kissed her, with tears in his eyes, and, without troubling to ask who she was, asked her permission to come and see her."

So we read in the novel; and Nestor Roqueplan, who had already been quoted, guaranteed the truth of the story told in the novel, writing:

"The pretty face, the eyes like velvet, the elegance of her figure, the small feet and hands—the Count discovered them all in his daughter's double whom he was about to entrust with the task of comforting his old age, abandoned as the result of the death of a darling child."

But the story was not true. Dumas himself contradicted it, writing in one of his Prefaces:

"The story of the consumptive daughter whose double the Duke discovered in Marie Duplessis is sheer inven-

tion. The Count, in spite of his great age, was not an Œdipus looking for an Antigone, but a King David looking for a Bath-sheba."

Liberties have been taken here with Scripture history. Dumas has confused the story of Bath-sheba with that of Abishag the Shunammite—the "young virgin" who was brought to David in his old age in order that she might "cherish him," and lie in his bosom that the King might "get heat." But that does not matter. The essential fact stands out that Marie Duplessis, for the sake of money—for no other motive can be imagined—submitted to the intimate caresses of a man old enough to be her great-grandfather; and that is not a circumstance on which a claim to the possession of "heart" can be based.

Nor can it be based upon the story of her marriage, in so far as she really was married, to Comte Edouard de Perrégaux.

He was a young man of fairly good family. His grandfather had been Governor of the Banque de France. On his mother's side he was connected with the wife of Marshal Marmont. He had been in the cavalry, and had seen service in Africa. An official report describes him as a "fairly competent officer, but of somewhat frivolous character." After his retirement he joined the Jockey Club; and it was no doubt through one of his fellow members that he was presented to Marie Duplessis.

The story of her relations with him is a tangle difficult to unravel. There is nothing helpful on the subject in either of Dumas' Prefaces to "La Dame aux Camélias"—an omission which, as it cannot possibly have been due to ignorance, may perhaps be attributed to the recollec-

tion of a wounded vanity. Marie Duplessis certainly knew Perrégaux before she knew Dumas; but his place in her life was not then an important one. He was Dumas' rival, presumably, but only one rival among many. He became important to Marie Duplessis only when Dumas ceased to be important to her; so that his story may properly wait until Dumas' story has been told.

CHAPTER XXI

IF we set the stage again for the drama—such as it was—we shall see that what happened was neither more nor less than what one would have expected to happen.

Dumas had suddenly been transformed from an awkward hobbledehoy, despised by his schoolfellows as a bastard, into a dashing young man about town. His temperament was ardent—the African blood in his veins contributing thereto—and he instinctively reacted against "repressions" as soon as restrictions were removed.

He found them all removed in the twinkling of an eye. His father exercised no sort of supervision over him, but delighted in him as "a chip of the old block," and encouraged him to follow his bad example. He would have been a singular young man if he had not followed it; but the social area within which he had the opportunity of following it was limited.

He was a young man of good manners and address. Though an octoroon, he was good-looking. But the only social path which opened before him was the path which led to Bohemia. Many of the men whom he met in Bohemia belonged to the aristocracy and the *bourgeoisie*. They welcomed him in Bohemia as his father's son. Some of them became quite friendly with him. But they had come to Bohemia from a world to which he did not belong and which he was not invited to enter. He did

not, and could not, move as an equal among the women of their circle.

The only women, other than those of the theatres and the Half World, with whom he had the opportunity of mixing were those of his mother's social standing; and he had received too good an education to have much in common with them or to feel comfortable in their society. Admission to the salon of a Queen of the Half World was, therefore, social preferment for him; and he was, partly for that reason, and partly because he was so very young, much more disposed than any of the *amants en titre* who subsidised such women to take them seriously and be sentimental about them.

One knows what they thought—that the boy was making a fool of himself. Most of them, no doubt, smiled at the spectacle with condescending cynicism; but one of them—Count Guy de la Tour du Pin, who belonged to one of the oldest families in France—was sufficiently interested in him to speak a word of warning.

It happened after he and the Count had been dining with a lady whom he describes as "a person of easy morals who had made a great name for herself in the world of venal gallantry," and who may very well have been Marie Duplessis herself; and this is what he reports the Count as saying to him:

"Young man, I am fifteen years your senior; so I feel justified in offering you a piece of good advice. The lady with whom we have just been dining is very charming and very clever. One always meets a great variety of interesting people at her table. Make all the observations which you have the opportunity of making; but when you are five-and-twenty don't let yourself be seen any

more either in her house or in any other house of the same description. It is precisely because I now find it impossible to get clear of this sort of thing that I warn you against it."

The advice was good. Dumas took it. He did not wait until he was five-and-twenty to take it. But he certainly did not recognize it as sound advice when it was offered, for he was then in the toils of the enchantress —an enchantress of refined manners who lived in the lap of luxury—an enchantress who was the talk of the town, whom rich men loaded with jewels, in whose company rich men were proud to be seen on first nights at theatres, who danced like a sylph, dressed like a duchess, gave wonderful dinner-parties, with costly silver plate and Sèvres porcelain on the table, and drove daily in the Bois de Boulogne in her carriage and pair.

The circumstances of his first meeting with her are, he assures us, described with fairly close accuracy in "La Dame aux Camélias." A sudden fit of coughing did oblige her to get up hurriedly and leave the room. He did follow her into her bedroom to see what was the matter and sit by her, holding her hand. She did accept as a sympathetic attention what might so easily have seemed an unwarrantable impertinence; and she soon afterwards gave him his reward, making him, if one may so put it, an honorary member of the select company which paid for and shared her good graces—the one *amant de cœur* in the midst of many *amants en titre*. And so we ask:

Did he really love her? Was she really in love with him?

Assuredly it is always very difficult to believe any

story of any man's passionate attachment to a woman whom he knows to be maintaining herself in luxury by selling herself to the highest bidder without even making a pretence of fidelity to the purchaser; but stories of the kind are sometimes, though seldom, true. It is an article of some young men's creed—and Dumas was very young—not only that courtesans can be redeemed by love, but that they themselves are the divinely appointed instruments of their redemption. Imaginative literature has sometimes encouraged the belief. Abbé Prévost made great play with it in "Manon Lescaut." The Romantics made still more play with it. Cynicism had not yet killed it in the eighteen-forties.

Dumas is likely enough to have been attracted by the idea—the more likely because he knew very few reputable women in those days, and none of the reputable women whom he did know had, like Marie Duplessis, the "come-hither" look in their eyes, and because her very obvious fragility commanded pity. His imagination, one can believe, supplied sentiment because his senses were excited, though one is bound also to suppose that his vanity was a factor in the case and was gratified when he found himself the favoured rival of men with much greater names and much longer purses than his.

He was too young to know—he does not seem to have had any one to tell him—that the position of *amant de cœur* of a woman to whom love is a trade lacks dignity and is apt to be called by a very ugly name.* It is doubtful, indeed, whether he quite understood that, even to the end of his days; and we may, therefore, take

* Maquereau.

it that, whether really in love or not, he believed himself to be in love, and that he spoke what he believed to be the truth when he explained his first theatrical success to Jules Claretie by saying:

"Nothing is easier than to write such a piece as I wrote. All that is necessary is to suffer a little and then to tell the story of one's sufferings in simple language."

The origin of Marie's emotion, whatever it may have been, must, of course, have been different. The woman who sells herself to several men cannot possibly love all the men who have bought her. The probability is that she loves none of them; and, if there is any sensibility in her temperament, she quite understands that their passion for her is something quite different from the love which she has read about in sentimental story-books.

Marie was rather fond of such books. A considerable collection of them was found on her shelves after her death. She wanted, one may fairly surmise, such an experience of love as she had read about in those books. She was not prepared to give up very much for it; but still she wanted it. Only an *amant de cœur* could give it to her; so when Dumas proposed himself as *amant de cœur*, she welcomed him.

That seems to be the inwardness of the story. Actual detailed information about it is hard to come by. The little that one can learn relates, as one would have expected, to surreptitious receptions in the alcove, ostentatious appearances in theatres and restaurants, and occasional excursions to the country. There is some evidence, too, of sympathetic encouragement from Dumas the Elder, who took a paternal pride in his son's successes; and then, after no long interval, came the breach,

the causes of which do not much matter and can only be conjectured.

It may be—it is quite likely—that Dumas found the office of *amant de cœur* unexpectedly expensive. There certainly seems to be a hint of that difficulty in the passage in the Preface to "La Dame aux Camélias" in which he writes of having "added a little pity to such expenditure as I could afford. . . ." It may be that he heard the ugly word which the French are so fond of using in such cases applied to his position as *amant de cœur*. It is possible, too, that he became jealous of the lovers on whose bounty Marie lived, and received, as he was quite sure to receive, evasive and unsatisfactory answers to his jealous protestations. It has even been said—whether truly or untruly one has no means of finding out—that Marie promised one night when in bed to give up her position as Queen of the Half World for love in a cottage with Dumas, but changed her mind in the morning because she had learnt to regard luxuries as necessaries.

In the novel we find a letter, written by Marguerite Gauthier to Armand Duval, picturing a complication which may very well have occurred in the true story on which the novel was based:

"My dear Friend:

"If I had £8,000 a year of my own, and were your mistress, and had another lover besides you, then you would be within your rights in asking why I was unfaithful to you. I should have been able to say: 'I am in need of £800.' You, being in love with me, would have found the sum, though you might have

reproached me afterwards for having asked you for it. I preferred not to place myself in your debt for anything. You have misunderstood my delicacy."

Marie Duplessis could not have written that letter, not being sufficiently a mistress of orthography and syntax; but the letter which we know Dumas to have written to her, when he decided to break with her, reads uncommonly like a reply to some rather less literary communication of the kind. It is a letter which he bought back in after years at a sale of autographs and presented to Sarah Bernhardt, bound up in a copy of "La Dame aux Camélias," as a token of his gratitude for her admirable impersonation of his heroine, when the piece was revived.

"This letter," he then wrote to Mme Bernhardt, "is the one tangible fragment of the story which now remains. It seems to me that you have a right to possess it because it is you who have just given renewed life and youth to this dead past."

The right, perhaps, is not quite so obvious to other people as to Dumas. One cannot help feeling—and, therefore, cannot help expressing—some surprise that the man who had worked for, and was proud of, a reputation as a moralist and a moral reformer, should have allowed this permanent proof of the follies of his foolish youth to pass out of his own hands. One feels bound to draw, yet again, the inference that it was not for nothing that this stern moralist was born with the hot blood of Africa in his veins. But one must print the letter to complete the story. It runs thus:

"My dear Marie:

"I am neither rich enough to love you in the way in which I should wish nor poor enough to be your lover on the terms which you propose. So let us both forget—you a name which must be very nearly indifferent to you—I a happiness which has become impossible for me.

"It is superfluous for me to tell you how sorry I am, for you know how much I love you. Good-bye, then. You have too tender a heart not to understand why I am writing this letter and too much intelligence not to forgive me for writing it.

"*Mille souvenirs.*

"A. D."

And that was that, and all was over; and there was no renewal of love nor, so far as one knows, any attempt at it.

The letter, it will be agreed, is more correct than passionate. It almost suggests an apprehension, on the part of the writer, that it might be printed in a newspaper and used in evidence against him. Love was probably dying, if not dead, when it was written—killed by the call for sacrifice which neither lover could consent to make; and one is not diverted from that belief by the fact that Dumas—though he knew that he had a successor in Marie's affectionate regard—wrote reams of bad poetry about her when he heard that she was dead, and was always ready, to the very end of his days, to shed the tears of sensibility over his recollection of the episode.

CHAPTER XXII

IN so far as Dumas' departure left a gap in Marie Duplessis' life, Edouard de Perrégaux filled it. In so far as she had a heart, he could claim to have caught it on the rebound.

She had known him before she knew Dumas, and even before Count Stackelberg came into her life and loaded her with jewels; but his place had been in the background. Her letters to him—a few of them have been published in the *Revue Encyclopédique*—show her keeping him there. They are hardly to be called love letters, in spite of the intercalated "love and kisses." Most of them are mere notes, accepting or declining invitations, or asking for theatre tickets. Only one of them has any significance—a letter in which she reproaches him for pressing attentions which may interfere with business.

She had planned an excursion to Italy with some other travelling companion. He had proposed to meet her there. Alarmed and angry, she dashed off this indignant protest:

"Do you want to do me an injury? You know perfectly well that what you propose would be very damaging to my future, which you seem resolved to make miserable and sad."

That stamps her. It is not the letter of a mistress to a lover. It is the letter of a woman to whom love is a trade,

and whose favours are commodities to be sold to the highest bidder. At that moment the highest bidder was apparently the Russian Count, who was wealthy enough to enrich her without impoverishing himself. As protector, therefore, he was preferred to Perrégaux, and as *amant de coeur* the young Dumas was preferred to him. His opportunity came when Dumas bowed himself out.

A vacancy has unexpectedly occurred. Badly as Marie Duplessis wanted luxury, she wanted certain other things as well. The ostentatious protection of wealthy men of the world was a benefit not to be lightly dispensed with; but she also wanted, as such women often do, a personable young man who would be, as people say, "silly" about her. That is her only real claim to be credited with "heart"; and she found young Perrégaux sufficiently silly about her to be willing to marry her. So he took her to London, some time in 1846, and went through a ceremony of marriage with her in a registry office in Brompton Road.

Whether the initiative was his or hers—whether he wished to make the social sacrifice or she exacted it as the price of the continuation of her favours—is uncertain. The marriage, in any case, though valid in England, was invalid in France, and was a hopeless failure. Another of the letters printed in the *Revue Encyclopédique* records the rupture:

"My dear Edouard,

"In all that you have written to me I see only one thing which calls for an answer. It is this: You want me to write that you are free to live as you like. I

told you that you were, the day before yesterday. I repeat what I then told you, and I sign myself:

"MARIE DUPLESSIS."

It was not to be quite the end of her relations with him. It was not quite the last letter which she was to write him—there is another to be quoted presently. But the breach was definite, and was never healed; and nobody knows for certain whose fault it was, or what had brought it about. Her biographers throw the blame upon him on the ground that he had nothing and she had everything to lose by the dissolution of the union; but the issue is not really quite so simple as that.

Money, no doubt, played its part in the drama. Edouard de Perrégaux, though reasonably well to do, had not the wealth of some of his rivals. Marie Duplessis, being a very expensive lady, must have been too expensive for him. Neither he nor she, one imagines, was enamoured of the simple life; but though it seemed natural to her, it seemed out of the question to him that she should continue to follow the lucrative calling of a fashionable courtesan while bearing the name of Comtesse de Perrégaux. Their conflicting attitudes towards life and its problems could not be reconciled, and separation was the only way out of the *impasse*. They took it and separated, and Marie Duplessis returned, after a very brief interval, to the old life.

She regarded herself as a Countess. She adopted armorial bearings, and had them stamped on her note paper, engraved on her dinner service, and painted on the panels of her carriage. But she did not call herself Comtesse de Perrégaux. "It was her custom," we read

in an obituary notice published in *Le Siècle*, "to conceal her rank in circumstances in which she might have compromised it; but, in all serious actions connected with her private life, she styled herself Comtesse du Plessis"—a title which, of course, she had no right whatever to assume, but which it was nobody's business to dispute.

Some sentimentalists have pictured her driven to despair and dissipation by her sentimental disappointment. M. Du Hays—a compatriot who was anxious to make out a case for her—tells us that "the life which circumstances had compelled her to live" had been "a cup of poison to her," and that while she forced herself to look bright and animated, her one desire was to find a way of escape. But that is nonsense unless we take the view that, being beautiful, she had an equally indefeasible title to luxury and to love, and must be pitied because she had to choose between the two things and preferred luxury. Whatever her disappointment, Marie Duplessis recovered from it sufficiently to set her cap at Franz Liszt, when he came to Paris.

It was unquestionably she, not he, who made the advances. She sent him, through her doctor, an invitation to one of her receptions. He called and was captivated. There was some question of her accompanying him—we are not told in what capacity—to Weimar, where he was Kapellmeister at the Grand-Ducal Court; but that idea was given up because he did not know—or, perhaps, because he did know—how the romantic experiment would be regarded in Court circles. There was then some question of his meeting her at Budapest and taking her to Constantinople; but that was not to be. Her illness and death intervened; and there

was nothing more for Liszt to do except to write her a testimonial.

The story of her relations with him is another of the stories which lack precision. According to one of her biographers he was "as generous to her as a Russian Prince." According to another, she was "willing to make for him the sacrifices which she had proposed to make for Dumas." All that we really know, if, indeed, we really know anything, is what he told his pupil, Mme Janka Wohl, when she persuaded him to talk, in his old age, about "sentimental opportunities which he had failed to make the most of." Marie, he told Mme Wohl, was delighted with the prospect of this trip to Constantinople, and he himself looked back upon it as "one of those stages in my journey through life, avoided with great difficulty, which I look back upon with the keenest regret"; and he added:

"I am not, as a rule, attracted by a Marion Delorme or a Manon Lescaut; but she was an exception to the rule. She had both heart and animation, and I maintain that she was a unique representative of her class."

A further proof that, whatever her faults, she had charm; that mysterious quality, the presence of which never fails to win indulgence for the unworthy, and the lack of which so often deprives the virtuous, to their aggrieved astonishment, of the affection which their solid worth has earned.

She travelled a little in the summer of 1846. One hears of her having been at Brussels, Spa, Ems and Wiesbaden, dividing her time between gambling halls, ballrooms and doctors' consulting rooms. One does not hear that any of her lovers were with her. She

was probably too ill to want a lover, or for such lovers as she had to want her; but while she was at Ems she sent this appeal—this S.O.S.—to Perrégaux:

"Forgive me, my dear Edouard. I kneel to you and beg your forgiveness. If you love me enough for that, send me two words—your pardon and your friendship. Write to at the Poste Restante, at Ems, in the Duchy of Nassau. I am alone here, and very ill; so you must make haste, dear, and forgive me. Good-bye.

"MARIE DUPLESSIS."

A proof, of course, that there had been something to forgive, and that the blame for the estrangement was by no means wholly his.

In the early autumn she returned to Paris, and got gradually worse. In October, she was still able to drive, in the afternoons, in the Bois de Boulogne. Even after that, she still occasionally made an effort and showed herself at a theatre or in a restaurant, looking a mere shadow of her old self; but everyone who saw her could see that the disease with which she had been battling for years had gained the mastery and was on the point of killing her. The New Year found her unable to leave her bed; and the end came early in February, 1847. Dumas the Elder, recalling her story, some years afterwards in *Le Mousquetaire*, wrote, with his keen eye for dramatic effect:

"Poor girl. She died in sorrow and poverty, as all these poor creatures do. Her creditors seized every article of furniture in her apartment except the bed on which she was lying in her death agony. It is a beautiful law which forbids the seizure of the bed and bedding.

But for that, she would have died on the floor. The carpet had been taken away."

But that is a purely fanciful picture.

Marie had, it is true, some pecuniary difficulties during her last months. Her creditors were unpleasantly insistent. Ready money was hard to come by. The ranks of her lovers were thinned. There were times when she could not pay her servants, and even borrowed from them. She was obliged to pawn a good many articles of jewelry—to the value, it is said, of about eight hundred pounds. But there was no seizure of her effects; and she was not deserted. The maid to whom she owed money remained with her to the last; and Perrégaux responded to her appeal, brought back to her, if not by a renewal of love, then by some sense of obligation to an extinguished sentiment. It is said that she refused to see him when he came; and one is left wondering whether her door was slammed in his face because he did not bring her as much money as she wanted, or whether he tightened his purse strings because the door was slammed in his face.

Nor does one know what had become of the other lovers, or whether she had any help from any of them. Probably they had dropped out of her life, one after the other, as her health gave way, not being attached to her by any sentimental tie. Even Stackelberg seems to have withdrawn, perhaps because her too open infidelities had hurt his feelings. He did not, at any rate, either attend her funeral or buy any souvenir at the sale of her effects.

That sale, described in the opening chapter of "La Dame aux Camélias," was a notable social event. Dickens,

who happened to be in Paris at the time, moralised about it in his letters. The French newspapers sent their star reporters to write it up. Ladies of title and of fashion attended it, for the sake of the opportunity which it gave them of studying the Half World at close quarters. The catalogue has been preserved and can still be inspected. The sum which the sale raised was about £3,600; and as the debts amounted to no more than half that sum, there was a balance of about £1,800 for Marie's sister, Delphine, who was living a virtuous life in the country.

Perrégaux buried her. He was the chief mourner—and almost the only mourner—at her funeral; and it was he who bought the grave. But he did not claim that she was Vicomtesse de Perrégaux. The question of the validity of the London marriage does not seem even to have been argued. The inscription on her monument describes her as Alphonsine Plessis.

It is a sad end to a strange story; but the story itself really contains very little that is not commonplace. If it had not been for Dumas, it would have been no more than a nine days' wonder, forgotten long ago. It is remembered solely because he made it the theme of the last and most successful attempt in the history of literature to place the halo of romance on the head of a fashionable prostitute, to picture such a one as an exponent of "the virginity of vice" and the innocent victim of the men at whose expense she flourished.

When he heard of her death, he was at Marseilles, on his way back from the trip to Spain and Algeria on which he had accompanied his father. He had been faithful to her in his fashion. That is to say, he had cherished the memory of his romance while taking steps

to console himself for the loss of it. Other names had linked with his—the names, mostly, of minor actresses; and Dumas the Elder, in his account of the journey in Spain, tells the world, with a chuckle of paternal pride, that his bright boy used to quit the party, from time to time, for an independent voyage to Cythera.

It was expensive. Marie Duplessis was by no means the only expensive woman in France. The contents of Dumas the Elder's money bowl had to be supplemented from other sources. In order to supplement them, the boy gambled and borrowed from money-lenders. The debts which he accumulated in this way before he set seriously to work amounted, he tells us, to £2,000. But though he "flung roses, roses riotously with the throng," he remained—or so he was persuaded—"desolate and sick of an old passion."

He hurried back to Paris, though there was no reason for his doing so. He wrote poetry—shockingly bad poetry, for he was no poet—recalling the ecstasies: this sort of thing:

Vous souvient-il des nuits, où, brûlante, amoureuse,
Tordant sous le baiser votre corps éperdu,
Vous trouviez, consumée à cette ardeur fiévreuse,
Dans vos sens fatigués le sommeil attendu?

And this sort of thing:

Alors vous regardiez, éclairée à sa flamme,
Le feu comme un serpent dans le foyer courir;

Car le sommeil fuyait de vos yeux, et votre âme
Souffrait déjà du mal qui vous a fait mourir.

That to begin with. Later, as we know, he wrote, first the novel, then the play, and finally the Prefaces.

"When," he wrote in the novel, "a man who inspires a courtesan with this redeeming love has a soul so generous that he can accept it without giving a thought to her past, when he abandons himself to it and loves as he is loved, that man has, at one stroke, exhausted all the emotions possible to man on this earth, and, after that love, his heart will be closed to any other."

"The man," he wrote elsewhere, "whom a woman has loved ever so little, provided that her love was disinterested, is her debtor for evermore, and, whatever he does for her, he can never do as much for her as she has done for him."

Did he mean it, or did he write like that because it flattered his vanity, to the end of his life, to regard himself and be regarded as the man of his book—the one book which any mention of his name instantly calls to the mind of any one who hears it?

It is impossible to say. He himself probably could not have said. The emotion must have been real enough at the time. If it had not been real, the book based on it would not have been convincing; and its sincerity may be said to stamp its author as the last of the Romantics. Later, no doubt, after he had ceased to be a Romantic, no other equally memorable emotion having intervened, a curious kind of vanity kept the memory alive and persuaded him that the passion which he had inspired, in

his youth, in the bosom of a courtesan, was as creditable to her as to him, proving her to be a very superior person, and entitling him, now that he had become a Holy Man, and a great moral preacher, to quote, with self-complacent self-satisfaction:

> Vixi puellis nuper idoneus,
> Et militavi non sine gloria:
> Nunc arma defunctumque bello
> Barbiton hic paries habebit.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Dumas the Younger told Dumas the Elder that he had, in the pursuit of the pleasures of immorality, incurred debts to the amount of £2,000, his father merely remarked:

"Very well. The way out of the mess is perfectly simple. Do as I do. Work."

It was probably the only sound advice that the old man ever gave him. He took it and wrote "La Dame aux Camélias." The suggestion has been made that his father wrote it for him in order to give him a good start in life; but that is absurd. The author of "Antony" may very well have advised the author of "La Dame aux Camélias," and given him a hint or two as to what would or would not "get over"; but the inspiration was unquestionably the son's, the work being the expression of an emotional experience of which the father was incapable.

The novel preceded the play. A theatrical manager thought the novel worth dramatising and proposed collaboration. The novelist agreed and the theatrical manager set to work and produced a piece which turned the story upside down, making it end happily, as the sentimental French lady declared that Renan's "Vie de Jésus" ought to have ended, "with a marriage." Dumas refused to have anything to do with his collaborator's happy ending.

"I was puzzled and perplexed," he tells us in the

Edition des Comédiens, "but, one fine morning, having nothing to do, I sat down and tried to write the piece as I felt that it ought to be written. I had no scenario. I had no plan in my mind. I simply went straight ahead, carried away by my emotions. When I had finished it, I took it to my father's copyist, but without any idea of showing it to my father, who had often told me that he did not believe such a subject could possibly be treated on the stage."

His father saw it, however. No doubt the copyist showed it to him. He naturally insisted upon reading it, and, having read it, he embraced his son, and shed the tears of sensibility and exclaimed:

"It is original; it is moving; it is audacious. It will have an immense success if ever it passes the censor. But the censor will never pass it. I am quite sure of that. Come and read it at the Théâtre historique. I want to see how it strikes the actors."

The actors approved and applauded; but there was no question of producing the play at the Théâtre historique, which was then on the eve of its bankruptcy.

It was found very difficult to get it produced, partly because managers had their doubts about its reception, and partly because the censors did, as Dumas the Elder had predicted, object. The young author succeeded in obtaining an interview with one of them.

"I found M. de Beaufort," he writes, "a man of great distinction. He informed me that the prohibition of my piece was due not only to its immorality but also to my father's renown and to the interest which the censors took in me. It would never do, they felt, to allow the son of Alexandre Dumas to make his début with a work

which would create a scandal and be hissed off the stage."

Whereto Dumas replied with the self-confidence of youth:

"A day will come, sir, when we shall have a Minister of Fine Arts who will be intelligent enough and considerate enough to authorise the production of my piece. I shall then invite you to come and see it. Its success will be enormous."

That was in the best Dumas style; and the prediction was fulfilled. M. de Beaufort lived not only to applaud "La Dame aux Camélias" when it was first produced at the Vaudeville, but to become, himself, the manager of the Vaudeville and revive it there in order to stave off a crisis in the fortunes of that theatre.

Fechter and Mme Doche created the leading parts. The success might have been even greater if the part of Marguerite Gauthier had been created by Rachel, to whom it would have appealed for the same reason for which the part of Adrienne Lecouvreur appealed to her, and there was, at one time, a chance that that would happen.

Rachel knew Dumas. He believed himself to be on very good terms with her. Having heard of his play, she asked him to read it to her. If she liked it, she said, she would talk about it at the Comédie Française, where her will was generally law. She named an evening on which he might call. But when he came to keep the appointment, he was stopped by the concierge who gave him a message:

"Madame told me, sir, to ask you to come some other

day. This evening she has gone to play cards with Mlle Zélie O—."

He did not come again, being too proud, or too shy, or too sensitive; and Rachel, when he next met her, seemed to have forgotten all about the play. She came to see it, however, and, he tells us, was so affected by it that she could not sit it out, the scene in which Marguerite Gauthier lies dying having "made such an impression on her that she suddenly opened the door of her box and ran out in order to escape from an emotion which might have ended in hysterics."

She came again, sitting, this time, in Dumas' box; and the same thing happened:

"She became excited; she turned pale. All of a sudden she jumped up and said to me: 'Take me out. Take me out. There's only just time.' I led her out of the box down to her carriage. She collapsed into it, bursting into tears."

No doubt, as she knew she was consumptive, the premonition of her own end upset her; and hers was not the only case in which the pathos of the scene had that effect. An actress of no importance who heard the play read at the Théâtre historique wept as copiously over it for the same reason. She was so sure, she said, that she was destined to die soon of the same malady as Marguerite Gauthier that she had bought Marie Duplessis' bed at the sale of her furniture; and that expectation was fulfilled. "She had," Dumas writes, "the consolation, denied to the other, of being looked after, in her last days, by Armand Duval"; and she told the woman who was nursing her that, as her life had been "irregular," she wished no women, but only eight men, whose names

she wrote out, to be invited to attend her to the cemetery. "My name," he continues, "was on the list. She died, two or three days later. We all kept the sad appointment except one comedian whom the girl had loved passionately, but who, as he was then living with another woman, thought it better to stay away for fear lest she should make a scene with him."

A story, of course, of no importance in itself, but one which throws instructive light on the social environment of Dumas the Younger's early days, and makes credible the story told of his conversation with a lady whom he once assured, after he had risen in the world, that his next play would deal with people in good society.

"But where," she is said to have asked him, "have you had an opportunity of studying them?"

"*Chez moi, madame!*" is said to have been his stiff and proud reply.

But that was later in his life, when he was an Academician and a moralist, entitled to go anywhere and say anything. The society in which, in his youth, he lived and moved and had his being was that of Bohemia and the theatres. If he entered more exalted circles, he did not, as people say nowadays, "belong," as he discovered when he had a love affair, which made some stir at the time, with a Russian Countess—a love affair which made his father prouder than ever of him as a gallant youth, capable as Aramis or d'Artagnan of troubling the heart of a "femme du monde."

There is nothing much in the story. Little is really known except that Dumas met the lady in Paris, and followed her to Russia, and that her husband, having

influence at the Russian Court, procured an order for his expulsion from the country. But the episode had its importance as a source of literary inspiration. It inspired a set of verses, a novel and a play.

We gather from the verses—so far as one can ever gather anything from verses—that he and she drove together to Saint-Cloud and spent an afternoon wandering about in the Park:

> Hier nous sommes partis au fond d'une voiture
> Enlacés l'un à l'autre, ainsi que deux frileux,
> Emportant, à travers une sombre nature,
> Le printemps éternel qui suit les amoureux.

We gather that the weather was bad and the Park deserted:

> A la grille du parc il nous fit donc descendre.
> Le parc était désert, triste et silencieux;
> Le vent roulait au ciel des nuages de cendre,
> Les arbres étaient noirs et les chemins boueux.

We find a certain diffidence—a certain "inferiority complex," one might almost say—in the fact that the lover addresses his mistress as "madame." The mode of address may possibly have been an inexperienced poet's concession to the exigencies of rhythm; but it also suggests the embarrassment of the country clown in the toils of Lady Clara Vere de Vere. It prepares us, at any rate, for the simple sequel, which is that the lady went away to a far country, and did not keep her promise to write:

C'est ainsi que, dès l'aube, assis à ma fenêtre,
Je parlais, maudissant et le soleil et Dieu;
Puis le jour commençant, j'espérais une lettre
Qui m'eût fait pardonner au ciel d'être si bleu.

Et le jour s'enfuyait comme avait fui la veille.
Rien.—Pas un mot de vous.—L'horizon bien ferme
Ne laissait même pas venir à mon oreille
L'écho doux et lointain de votre nom aimé.

Un morceau de papier, c'est pourtant peu de chose;
Quatre lignes dessus, ce n'est pourtant pas long.
Si l'on ne veut écrire, on peut prendre une rose
Eclose le matin dans un pli du vallon.

Que de fois vous avez oublié de le faire.
Et chaque jour c'était un désespoir nouveau.
Mon coeur se desséchait, comme ces fruits qu'on serre
A la fin de l'été, dans l'ombre d'un caveau.

No more than that. The poet says nothing of the pilgrimage of love which took him to Russia or of the ukase which sent him back, whether because he wrote his poem before he went to Russia, or because the recollection of his discomfiture was too painful to write about. He reprinted the lines, however, in the Preface to "Diane de Lys"; and he tells us in that Preface that "Diane de Lys" was, like "La Dame aux Camélias," "the cry evoked by a personal emotion to which art has given a development and a logical conclusion which happily were absent from the actual story."

He adds that that is how all the great emotional

writers have worked, that "it is thus that Shakespeare and Molière made use of their loves, their passions, their jealousies, their despairs, and even the experiences which made them ridiculous"; but he disclaims all title to pity both on their behalf and on his own. Such men, he says, have not really suffered "in the true sense of the word." They have simply endured the pains of childbirth and produced masterpieces. The reward is well worth the price paid for it.

It is a way, like another, of contending that "Diane de Lys" is a masterpiece—which it certainly is not. It is also a way, like another, of healing a wound inflicted upon a lover's self-esteem. And it also marks progress and represents a stage in the evolution of an author who, after beginning life as a young man about town, thoroughly appreciative of the pleasures of immorality, grew up to lay down moral laws for our guidance, as wise as those of Solon and as severe as those of Draco.

There are only three love affairs of his about which anything is known. There may have been others after his separation from his first wife, Princess Narishkin, whom he married in 1857; but nothing is known about them. He slammed the door in the faces of the inquisitive by forbidding the publication of his correspondence; but some letters of his which have been published—he published some of them himself—to the distinguished actress Aimée Desclée show us how his attitude towards love was modified as he grew older.

Whether he really loved Marie Duplessis or not—and it is hard to take that infatuation seriously—he certainly was proud of having touched her heart and enjoyed her favours either gratuitously or at a reduced

tariff. It was an achievement of a sort; and he evidently felt that, in boasting of it, he was, so to say, laying a floral offering on her grave. It delighted him, as he confesses, in one of his Prefaces, to swagger on the Boulevards as the man of his book: *digito monstrari et dicier hic est.*

That is the first stage.

He outgrew it, or was educated out of it. In writing of his second love affair he names no names, but accepts the view which the lady, being a "femme du monde," may, perhaps, have impressed upon him, that reticence is the better part of gallantry. His pose, if it be a pose, is now that of the man who has suffered and been strong, but looks back upon his suffering without regret because it has supplied him with emotions which he can remember in tranquillity for the edification of mankind.

That is the second stage. When he reaches the third stage, he figures no longer as a lover, actual or potential, but as an impersonal philosopher who, when asked for love, offers good advice as a substitute therefor.

Aimée Desclée was an actress whom he had discovered in Brussels, and for whom—not for sentimental reasons, but because he admired her talents—he had procured an engagement in Paris. He became, he tells us, "to some extent the confessor of this poor creature;" and the correspondence gradually assumed a character which he had not contemplated when he began it. It was not only as an artist but as a woman that she desired a confessor; and she made no secret of the fact that her reason for choosing Dumas as her confessor was that she was in love with him. She told him so in letter after letter.

She was, she knew and admitted, one of the "women whom men don't marry"; but she saw no reason why

AIMÉE DESCLÉE

such women should be condemned to perpetual virginity. They wanted babies as badly as other women. She did; and this was a matter in which Dumas might very well help her: an alliance between the creator of a great dramatic work of art and its interpreter seeming to her the most natural thing in the world.

She made no false pretence to virtue. She admitted her lapses—rather serious lapses. She had been untrue, she confessed, to one paramour, and the other paramour for whom she had forsaken him had been untrue to her. But what of that? "He was so handsome": and she had not sold but given herself. And now, she felt, the time had come for her to be redeemed by real love, as Armand Duval would have liked to redeem Marguerite Gauthier; and her great desire was to entrust Dumas with the task of redemption. So she invited him to undertake it; and his reply to the proposal was not a declaration of love, but a sermon—a queer sermon, too, in view of a certain confession contained in it.

We find him writing to her of himself, in the third person, thus:

"You are young, and he is no longer young, but old enough to be your father. Indeed he very nearly was your father, and has no right to forget that fact. It is, therefore, thanks to this inevitable logic of circumstances, as one who is morally your father, that he now tries to give you, if he can, the moral strength which your actual father failed to give you."

The meaning is clear: that Aimée Desclée's mother had been his mistress, and that his case, if he had accepted her offer of love, would have been compared by those who knew the story, as many doubtless did, to that of

Molière marrying Madeleine Béjart's daughter—an impossible case, even if he had been in love with her, for such a respectable moralist as he had now become. And he did not love her, and had no intention of trying to love her, knowing that love is a sentiment, independent of human volition, which, like the wind, "bloweth where it listeth," and having always, unlike his illustrious father, held that love affairs between authors and actresses were to be deprecated.

So he could not be her redeemer; but he could not encourage her determination to seek the seclusion which a convent grants as an alternative to becoming his mistress:

"What would be the good of that? You wouldn't stay there. Besides, there are convents everywhere for those who want them. The only real and true convent is self-respect."

Her conduct, too—he came to that at last—had it not been rather shocking? Her admissions having raised the question, he must answer it; and he proceeded to do so in language hardly less stern and vigorous than that of an evangelical tub-thumper in his pulpit:

"A woman is nothing unless she and a man are allied to make one person. You had found the saviour, the companion, whom you needed in one of our theatrical colleagues. He would certainly have been willing to marry you, or, at any rate, to let you live with him, as his wife, as long as you cared to. But you preferred to compromise yourself with a strolling player—some wretched Adonis of the mountebanks' booth; and so you have found your way back into the dank valley

in which the victims of a moral goitre swarm and pullulate."

That is the last letter. The story ends on that note. That cynical critic, Paul Souday, suggested that it might have ended differently if Aimée Desclée had been younger and more attractive; but it is idle to speculate about that. Its actual end—and the manner in which that end was reached—shows the ultimate Dumas: the Dumas who, having climbed, in the grand manner, on stepping stones of his dead self to higher things, was equally proud of his past exploits as a gay Lothario and his present position as a moralist and a moral reformer.

It remains only to show by what stages he reached that position and to examine the moral philosophy which he preached after he had attained to it.

CHAPTER XXIV

"LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS" was a happy accident,—a last echo of the Romantic Movement. Having written it, Dumas left Romanticism behind him and invented the form of drama known as the *drame-à-thèse* and the dramatic character known as the *raisonneur*.

The *drame-à-thèse* is not exactly a play with a purpose, but very nearly so. It deals with a social problem and through the mouth of the *raisonneur* expounds the author's attitude towards it. Whether the play really proves anything or not, the *raisonneur* takes the centre of the stage, from time to time, and tells us what it is supposed to prove. And so, as Edmond de Goncourt put it, when writing up his Diary after attending the *première* of "Les Idées de Madame Aubray,"—a play in which a lady given to good works advises a young relative to marry a repentant Magdalen:

"It is not really a dramatic performance. It is a sort of divine service attended by a congregation of the devout. The author hands out to the men and women of the world to which he ministers, in language which they are capable of understanding, the ideal commonplaces of their hearts."

Dumas was already feeling his way towards the *drame-à-thèse* in "Diane de Lys": a conventional story of a young married woman who repents of having listened

to the blandishments of a lover—her social inferior, in the eyes of the world, as he is merely a painter—finds happiness, to that lover's distress, in the arms of her husband, whom she had supposed to be indifferent to her, but whom she discovers, in the last Act, to be both fond of her and worthy of her.

It is poor stuff, albeit based, Dumas assures us, on an amorous misadventure of his own; but it marks a stage in his development. The picture which we see in it is that of a Don Juan taking stock of himself and beginning to blossom out into a moralist; and that picture stands out very clearly when we compare "Diane de Lys" with two novels, previously written, which the same misadventure is said to have inspired—"La Vie à Vingt ans" and "La Dame aux Perles." From the three different presentations of the story three different morals are drawn.

In the first version the infidelity of an unfaithful wife is condoned:

"When a woman has neither a father to watch over her nor a mother to give her good advice, when she has no child to retain her in chastity under the conjugal roof, when she enjoys liberty, which tempts so many women to do wrong, when all her wishes have been gratified and she is not yet thirty—what else can you expect?"

In the second version the misconduct is condemned, but extenuating circumstances are allowed for:

"A wife assuredly ought not to deceive her husband: that is the fundamental law of society. Nothing sure or stable can be based upon a convention of the heart which is not guaranteed by any social institution, but

finds all our social institutions in arms against it. Illicit love leads, sooner or later, to an impossible situation unless both the man and the woman are heartless."

And then, in the third version, we have the husband exclaiming, apparently with the author's full approbation:

"You entered my house as a thief. Why should I fight with you when I should be within my rights in killing you? It may be that society is badly organised, and that my wife and I ought never to have married; but I am quite sure that I am my wife's husband, that I mean to keep her to myself, and that nothing in the world can prevent me from doing so, for the simple reason that she is my wife. So much for the present. As for the future—if I ever again find you in my wife's society in circumstances similar to those in which I have just found you with her, I shall avail myself of the right which the law accords me and shall kill you."

Such are the first stages in the evolution of the moralist. They show us what road he was travelling. We begin to see what goal he was to reach when we come to "Le Demi-Monde." Here the characteristic Dumas is, for the first time, recognizable; and here the moralising is no longer incidental, the tears of sensibility are no longer shed or invited, and a definite social problem is faced.

The Half World treated is not, be it observed, the Half World of gallantry which Marie Duplessis had adorned. Its *demi-mondaines* are not courtesans, but *déclassées* women whose pasts invite a closer inspection than they will bear; unfaithful wives living apart from their husbands, cast off mistresses living on the bounty

of protectors who "behaved well" and pensioned them when they left them in order to marry and settle down.

They are "fallen women," no doubt, in the eyes of Society and the Church; but they have not fallen quite into the gutter. They behave with outward correctitude, keep each other in countenance, and form a society of their own. They "receive." Men of quite good position in the world attend their receptions and are often on the best of terms with them; but these men's wives and sisters and daughters are never to be seen in their houses. These women, whose social equals they once were, refuse to know them; while they, on their part, refuse to mix with courtesans or any other women whom they regard as their social inferiors.

It is a Half World which has disappeared. There is neither need nor room for it in a society in which divorce is almost as normal as marriage and the claims of women to be judged by the same moral standards as men are trumpeted by all the Feminists from all the housetops. But it was a real world when Dumas wrote, and one which presented problems of real interest to the moralist, albeit, perhaps, a strange world for a moralist to be moving in.

Dumas tells us, in his Preface, that he discovered it by accident: that a strange lady accosted him, at a masked ball at the Opera, and carried him off to it. The story sounds rather too good to be true; but it does not matter whether it is true or not. In any case Dumas did enter this Half World and was never, even in his most moral days, ashamed of having sojourned in it, holding perhaps that he had every bit as good a right as King Solomon—the wisest man, we are told, who ever lived

—to learn in the school of pleasant experience the important moral lessons which it behoved him to teach in crushing moral aphorisms.

The nature of the society in which he was receiving his social education can, of course, be inferred from the scene in the first Act, in which an officer meeting a lady to whom he is engaged to be married in the house of a gentleman whom he has just met for the first time, asks that perfect stranger whether she is or is not his mistress; but we will let that pass and glance at the story.

It is the story of the attempt of a *déclassée* to recover her social position through marriage with an honourable man who knows nothing of her past. It relates the defeat of her ambition by two men who have been her lovers and who conceive it to be their duty to threaten to tell the man who loves her *pour le bon motif* all about their past relations with her unless she abandons her design; and it indicates, in the eloquent harangues of the *raisonneur*, the attitude of the moralist towards the moral problem raised.

Men, we gather, may quite properly spend a great deal of their time in the Half World, provided that they keep their wives and daughters out of it—they would not be men of the world if they did not. Nor does any moral stain attach to the man who has, in his time, enjoyed the favours of one or more of the women now relegated to the Half World. He has no need to live down his past, but can quit the Half World, when he has had enough of it, marry a woman of his own world, and be acclaimed as *honnête homme* and *homme de cœur* and all the rest of it. But the woman's fault, in which the man must obviously have been a partner, is unpardonable; and men

of the world, whatever their lapses, must stand shoulder to shoulder in order to prevent her from retracing her steps and recovering the esteem which she has forfeited.

It was not a new thesis. It merely formulated the rough attempt of our rude forefathers to reconcile the rights of men of the world to amuse themselves with the sanctity of family life. Its morality was one-sided and therefore unjust; but Dumas was so fully convinced of its morality and justice that, after he had been obliged to transfer the play from the Comédie Française to the Gymnase because its theme was regarded as too indecorous for production at the national theatre, he submitted it in competition for a prize of two hundred pounds, offered by the Minister of Fine Arts to the author of a play "calculated to instruct the working classes by the propagation of sound ideas and the spectacle of good examples."

And he nearly got the prize. The members of the Committee of Selection who voted for giving it to him included Théophile Gautier, Prosper Mérimée and Sainte-Beuve. But the Minister said that he would sooner suppress the prize than see it awarded to Dumas; and Scribe also voted against him—Scribe, his hated rival who took nothing seriously and could see nothing in the complications of adulterous intrigue except the convenient substructure of vaudeville and farce.

Was he serious in asking for the prize, or did he insist that his play was moral merely because people in high places had declared that it was not? It is impossible to say, for the Preface in which he tells the story was not written until many years afterwards, and cannot, therefore, be read as a faithful reflection of his feelings at the

time. But Scribe's opposition unquestionably rankled—the more bitterly, perhaps, because Scribe's plays made more money than his—and he took an early opportunity of telling the world what he thought of Scribe. He admitted his mastery of stage craft; but he went on:

"What he lacks is the burning desire to be of some use to his fellow-men, the ambition to teach them something, to support morality with argument and to reinforce the power of conscience."

Be that as it may, however, we see in "Le Demi-Monde," not the moralist fully made, but only the moralist in the making; and we have his admission that the teaching of moral lessons was an afterthought with him, —that his first objective was money and his second celebrity:

"I was athirst for fame," he confesses, "because of my constant proximity to my father and his radiant renown. He was so illustrious that I think I should have died of shame and jealousy if I had not contrived to acquire a little glory of my own."

It is a way of saying that the favours of the public, like the favours of Marie Duplessis, were his consolation for the stigma of illegitimacy. When he had won them, they filled him with a sense of his importance. His father's star was setting as his star rose; and he saw himself climbing to a position from which he would be able to patronise his father, and give him good advice, not because he was more highly gifted (for he was not), but because he was more respectable and better off—a member of that Academy of Letters from which his father was excluded—highly respected at a time when the old man, in his premature old age, was coming, in

spite of his genius, to be classed with those who have "no friends, no money, no reputation and no wish to do well."

His father seems never to have suspected him of wanting to preach elsewhere than in the home circle. That is quite clear from his analysis of his son's artistic methods:

"Alexandre looks for and adopts a type. Or, rather, a type takes hold of him—not an ideal, but a material type—a type which exists or has existed. This starting point found, Alexander begins with the scene which seems to him the most interesting or amusing, trusting that the rest will come afterwards. And the rest comes; but that is where the trouble begins. Ten times he stops to take breath, and flatters himself that he has finished. Ten times he perceives that his work is incomplete and begins it all over again. He rewrites whole Acts and changes their order. He takes out characters whom he had thought indispensable and introduces new ones who he sees will be useful, or whom he had not before thought of. As he had not found everything when he sat down to write, he can always find something more."

Which is fair enough, as far as it goes, but does not go all the way, and certainly does not show us, even by implication, all the differences between the aims and gifts of the father and the son.

It does point the contrast between the genius which was like a flash of lightning and the talent which could do itself justice only by taking infinite pains; but it misses that between the dramatist whose starting point was a "situation" and the dramatist whose starting point

was an idea for the elucidation of which situations had to be contrived.

It could not be assumed, of course, that Dumas the Younger would take to preaching because he had ideas. It is no more true that all the people who have ideas want to preach than that all the people who want to preach have ideas. He became a preacher gradually and for various reasons, not all of which, it may be, are discoverable: because his father had set him a bad example, and his mother's stabilising influence had taught him how bad that example was; because, from his schooldays onwards, he had been embittered by the world's disdainful attitude towards unmarried mothers and their children—and also a little, perhaps, because people with African blood in their veins so often take to stump oratory as ducks take to water.

He tells a story which illustrates the bitterness of his resentment of his illegitimacy and the social disadvantages which it entailed. A schoolfellow who had taunted him as a bastard met him, one day, on the Boulevard, and, with an ingratiating smile, held out a patronising hand. Dumas, who was just then beginning to be successful, reminded him of his taunts and concluded:

"If ever you dare to speak to me again, I'll break every bone in your body."

He might have got over that, comforted by success, and lived at peace with all the world, if he had been as successful in his domestic relations as he was in the theatre; but it seems that he was not. No tales have been told, and no details can be given; but it is known that, though his marriage began romantically, he and his first wife, Princess Narishkin, were presently maintaining

separate establishments—a circumstance which seems to have given him something fresh to preach about. Whence, one conjectures, his intense and unceasing interest in the question of divorce, and also his general dissatisfaction with the social conditions of his time, and the impulse which moved him, when he found the public hanging on his words, to try to set the world to rights by speaking words in season.

That partly explains him as a preacher. Some obscure neurosis may also have been a factor in the case—he was more than once under the weather with a nervous breakdown; and the rest of the explanation may, perhaps, be found in the fact that he took, like Mr. George Moore, to reading the Bible late in life, and, being favourably impressed, began searching the Scriptures, if not for guidance, then for texts on which to hang his discourses and rhetorical reinforcements of his philosophy of life.

And so we come to the climax of the evolutionary process which we have been tracing: a neurotic Dumas, half man of the world and half minor prophet, at one moment recalling pleasant memories of unregenerate days, and at the next seeing apocalyptic visions, and demanding the death penalty for the woman taken in adultery.

CHAPTER XXV

PREACHING is a form of self-indulgence in which some men find great pleasure. Laymen, when they take to it, enjoy it even more than clergymen. They find it easy, and it makes them feel important—the chartered libertines of the spoken word, privileged to adopt a high moral tone while generalising from single instances.

Dumas enjoyed preaching as much as anyone. Preaching was, for him, a form of fighting; and he delighted in fighting. His plays had always resembled sermons in one respect. They had all, in so far as they were exercises in dialectics, been generalisations from the single instances presented by hard cases. In order that he might develop into a preacher, opposed to the conventional and the orthodox, but similarly armed, it remained only for him to search the Scriptures and add the intoxication of their eloquence to that of his own verbosity. His searching of them, late in life, gave him, if not the outlook on life, at least the prose style of a God-intoxicated man.

Neurosis may have been partly responsible. The neurosis may have been aggravated by the painful shock of the war of 1870. It was, at any rate, after a nervous breakdown, and in the year of the war, that he surprised the world by striking a new note and admonishing, not only the enemy, but also his own countrymen, in the mystical diction of the author of the Apocalypse.

"I am your judge," he told the former; and then he proceeded to prophesy their confusion in a series of enigmatic sentences, all beginning with the same conjunction:

"And I see these things clearly. And, in the first place, the Germans who have entered our house like wolves will, one day, run back to their own house like hares. And the German edifice will crumble, before it is finished, as Babel did, and as every human assault upon Heaven has crumbled. And Pelion will once more be piled upon Ossa. And Prince Fritz and his children will shed red tears of blood. And the Kings will utter loud cries while taking flight towards the Pole. And three quarters of these things will be accomplished before the end of the century, and the remainder of them will be fulfilled before the first half of the next century."

A fairly accurate prediction, no doubt, of the result of the European War of 1914, when the "hubris" of the German militarists went the way of the previous "hubris" of Napoleon, but possessing no more real significance—being no more fortified by ratiocination—than the wild utterances of Solomon Eagle, when the terror of the great Plague unhinged his mind. Contemporaries saw nothing in it but "the ideas of vaudeville couched in the language of the Book of the Revelation of Saint John the Divine." But Dumas enjoyed using that language, and proceeded to apply it to the social problems of the age.

He saw Paris, he said, as a "crucible" from which there emerged a Beast with "seven heads and seven horns,"—a Beast which resembled "a leopard with the feet of a bear, the throat of a lion and the strength of a

dragon." The Beast, he observed, was "clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold ornaments and precious stones and pearls," and "held in its hands, which were white as milk, a golden vase full of the abominations of Babylon and Sodom and Lesbos"... Its body exhaled an "intoxicating vapour." It spoke no word. One heard only "the grinding of its jaws." Its heads rose higher than the highest mountains. Its seven mouths, wide open and grinning, were red as coals of fire. Its fourteen eyes were green as the waters of the ocean:

"And above each of the ten diadems surmounting the ten horns, in the midst of all manner of blasphemous words, there flamed, in letters larger than those of all the others, the word 'PROSTITUTION.'"

A very mad tirade, sketching an impossible picture, for it is quite obvious that the colour of the eyes of a Beast whose heads were higher than the highest mountains could not possibly be distinguished by the spectator on the plain; but a tirade from which, nevertheless, one disengages the idea that prostitution was "the enemy," and which prepares one for the more explicit pronouncement that prostitution by "dissolving our vital elements, and slowly undermining our morality, our faith and our family life," has brought about "the great pity of France,"—the invasion and the Commune.

It was certainly a strange conclusion for the author of "La Dame aux Camélias" to come to. It accords neither with the levity of the young man about town who had been so pleased with himself when Marie Duplessis smiled on him nor with the sentimentalism of the dramatist who had made excuses for her and wept for her; and

he was quite intelligent enough to know that the difference between her position in the world and that of the prostitutes was one not of kind but of degree. But he had grown up since he had known her—that is really all that there is to be said about it; and it was largely in his capacity for growing up that he differed from his father.

Dumas the Elder had grown old without growing up. The black blood in his veins had stunted his growth and kept him a child, or, at any rate, an irresponsible young man, in his attitude towards moral problems, in spite of his genius, to the last. Dumas the Younger, being more nearly a European—an octoroon instead of a quadroon—did grow up, did cease to be a creature of impulse, and did try hard—harder and harder as he grew older—in spite of his limitations, to see life steadily and see it whole.

But he had his limitations, and they are important; the range of his vision, except when he fell into apocalyptic extravagances—and perhaps even then—being limited because both his education and his experience of life had been limited. And a defective education, though a preacher may make light of it, relying on his fluency, is an inconvenient handicap for a philosopher.

The trouble was not merely that Dumas had left school too early, judged incapable, as we have noted, of passing the French examination which corresponds to our "London matric." There had been gaps in his social, as well as in his scholastic, preparation for the battle of life. He had never, in the impressionable years, been on the right terms with the right people—least of all with the right women; and his social outlook—

his outlook on the social problems on which he concentrated his attention—had been warped and distorted by that disadvantage.

One knows nothing of the women whom he met in his mother's circle. They were probably reputable but uninteresting and undistinguished. The women whom he met in his father's house were mostly actresses; and a very wide gulf then separated actresses from the women whom we, in England, called "ladies" and the French called "femmes du monde."

Public opinion set different standards for the two groups. They came from different social strata, and they did not mix. The "ladies," though they might not always "behave as such," were, at least, expected to do so; but nobody thought any the better of actresses for being virtuous, or any the worse of them for lapsing from virtue. They were expected to lapse from it. If any of them ever affected not to have done so, cynical men of the world smiled incredulously at the affectation.

Naturally, therefore, they did lapse from it, frequently, openly and indiscriminately. Several of them were, one after the other, the Elder Dumas' mistresses. When they left other men for him, or left him for other men, everybody knew all about it. His wife was one of many women of that kind who followed that course. Whence it followed that, whatever other women Dumas the Younger may have met in the days of his youth, these were the women whom he really knew—these and such stars in the firmament of gallantry as Marie Duplessis. In the eyes of the rest he was an interesting visitor from another social world. They liked him; they were polite to him; they flattered him. But they did

not explain themselves to him because he did not "belong."

Those were the limitations. They account for the fact that, though he grew up to take a serious view of life, he arrived at that view without any conscious conversion, any sense of "grace abounding to the chief of sinners," or even any disposition to submit to clerical authority. He found morality without finding religion, remaining a freethinker to the last, and firmly convinced that his youth satisfactorily excused and explained everything that he had done as a young man; but his view of the world which he wanted to set to rights and the problems which he undertook to solve were necessarily coloured by the pleasant recollections of his unregenerate days.

Life, in truth, presented only one problem to him: that of the relation of the sexes. Love and gallantry constituted for him, when he became a philosopher and a preacher, not "three-fourths of life," but the whole of it. He had come into the world as the innocent victim of a careless adventure in gallantry, and had suffered contumely in consequence. He had seen his mother, whom he loved, treated badly by his father, whom he liked. That was the starting point of his reflections.

Later he came to know, by hearsay and repute, a world in which people married and lived happily ever afterwards—a world in which brides were pure and innocent and husbands and wives were devoted to each other; but it is a question whether he ever really believed in it or regarded it as anything but a Utopia which his eloquence might create. The world into which he had been born, and in which he lived, was a world in

which courtesans were queens and love—or what passed for love—involved, or resulted in, a change of partners almost as frequent as that of the dance called "Paul Jones."

It was an ideal world for a dramatist to exploit, for nothing lends itself better to effective theatrical situations than do the *chassés-croisés* of adulterous relations. Dumas exploited it successfully, and made quite a lot of money out of it, though not quite as much as Scribe made. Then, by degrees, he took to moralising about it; and though it is difficult to credit him with all the moral purposes for which he claimed credit in the Prefaces which he wrote afterwards, he does, in the plays of his middle period, impress one as a moralist *malgré lui:* one who was a moralist by nature, though the stream of moral tendency had been dammed and diverted by agreeable experiences and a bad example.

In the end the stream burst the dam and came down in spate.

Dumas did not repent—one can never insist too emphatically upon that. One can picture him brushing any suggestion of repentance aside as either a gratuitous hypocrisy or a wanton waste of valuable time. But he did set himself, or feel that he had been set, a task—the task of finding a formula which would bridge the gulf between that life which he knew so intimately and that other life of which he had heard such excellent accounts.

He found many formulæ. He was a man who thought in formulæ and collected formulæ as philatelists collect stamps. We have already picked up a few of them and seen that his recommendations ranged from a recom-

mendation that unmarried women who had no private means should be kept out of mischief by being conscripted for forced labour to a recommendation that the husbands of unfaithful wives should be permitted to murder them. It remains to be seen whether the various recommendations can be reconciled with each other and pieced together into a coherent system of social philosophy.

CHAPTER XXVI

SEX questions, it must be repeated, were the only philosophical questions which interested Dumas.

He took no interest in religion except when religious leaders contradicted him. He had never heard of the metaphysics of ethics. All transcendental philosophy, from Plato to Hegel, was, for him, a sealed book which he never thought of opening and would have been unable to understand if he had opened it. He excused himself from thinking on such matters by calling himself a freethinker. Life was, for him, simply a tangle of sex questions which it was the task of the philosopher to unravel. Having toyed with those questions in his plays, he proceeded to generalise about them in pamphlets and propagandist works such as "L'Homme-Femme" and "La Question du Divorce." He derived his conclusions—it would be gross flattery to say that he deduced them—from two sets of premises which contradict each other.

His first premise, of which he was particularly proud, was this: that the normal—and, indeed, invariable—relation between the sexes is a state of war.

There was nothing new in that, however. Alfred de Vigny had already said it in his wrath, in the hour of his defeat, in a furious quatrain:

> Une lutte éternelle, en tout temps et tout lieu,
> Se livre sur la terre en présence de Dieu,

Entre la bonté d'Homme et la ruse de Femme,
Car la femme est un être impur de corps et d'âme.

All that because an actress had thrown him over for a juvenile lead: the fact that he himself had previously thrown his wife over for the actress seeming to him irrelevant. Dumas' generalisation, however, though it echoed Vigny's, was not like his, the bitter cry of a disappointed lover. It gives one the impression, rather, of having been based upon the proceedings of the heroines of comedies—his own, his father's and Scribe's—and it is loosely hung on to Darwin's teaching about the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest.

"Observe," Dumas writes, "the most violent struggle of all is not our struggle against the elements, against barbarism, against famine, or against ambition, war and conquest. Far more violent is the internecine strife between male and female, which is formidable, eternal, of daily recurrence, unceasing, and the more terrible because the combatants begin by adoring each other, or by believing, or at any rate affirming, that they do so. And, let us say it at once—not in woman's praise, for we have something better to do than to praise her, but to her glory—that man, though apparently the victor, is always vanquished in this battle."

Which resonant rhetoric is nonsense, absolutely irreconcilable with either the rhetorician's family circumstances or with other doctrines which he professed at other times.

It might be reconciled, indeed, with the spectacle of sex warfare which he had seen in the Villa Monte Cristo; for the elder Dumas' mistresses had always gained one advantage over him, when he stormed at them and turned

them out—the advantage of leaving him poorer than they had found him. But that was not the whole of life, and he knew it. His mother certainly had not triumphed over his father, when he deserted her, nor had Marie Duplessis gained any triumph over the band of lovers which melted away when failing health destroyed her charms. Nor would Dumas, if he had really seen the sexual life of his time as a contest in which women were better able than men to take care of themselves, have clamoured, as he constantly did, for legislation to protect them. Nor would he have written:

"Society depends upon the family. The family depends upon marriage. The basis of marriage is love."

That is the second premise. It contradicts the first, and, like the first, is clear-cut in form only, and not based upon clear thinking. The statement, put forward as a proposition universally true, that "the basis of marriage is love" confuses the ideal with the actual and challenges a demand, nowhere gratified in Dumas' writings, for a definition of love. For his whole problem arises out of the tricks which love, or what we take for love, plays us, and the unfortunate fact that love is *not* the invariable basis of marriage, can disappear from marriage even when it has originally been its basis, can exist apart from marriage, and may then make marriage an intolerable situation.

Dumas, the dramatist, knew that as well as the next man, and neither saw nor pretended to see any more romance in the "mariage de convenance" than is visible to the rest of us. Dumas, the preacher, displayed quite a different mentality. Instead of deducing his conclusions from his premises, he arrived at his conclusions

by instinct and then looked out for premises upon which to base them in the spirit in which the preacher, bent upon admonishing us for some particular sin, searches the Scriptures for a relevant and impressive text for his discourse.

What are the moral rights, and what ought to be the legal rights, of illegitimate children and unmarried mothers? Should the courtesan and the prostitute be the objects of our pity or of our scorn? Ought marriage to be a permanent status or a dissoluble contract? If the latter, what grounds should be held to justify its dissolution? Are men and women under an equal obligation to observe the moral law? What is the proper punishment of an unfaithful wife? Whose business is it to inflict that punishment? Is there any reason why her husband should not kill her? Is not the general recognition of that right of his—proved by so many acquittals in so many *causes célèbres*—the strongest of all imaginable reasons for a revision of the marriage laws and the revival of those divorce laws which the Revolution introduced and the Restoration, with its shameless subservience to clerical influences, abolished?

Those were the main questions to which Dumas addressed himself, in the manner, in the main, of a man who was a philosopher among dramatists and a dramatist among philosophers—inclined, therefore, to take his facts as freely from his imagination as from his experience, and firmly convinced that any utterance which was dramatically effective must necessarily enshrine a profound eternal truth.

We need not follow him through all his answers. If we did, we should find ourselves in a welter of contra-

dictions not less striking than that which compels us to admire the spectacle of Marie Duplessis' favourite lover denouncing prostitution as one admires that of Satan rebuking sin. But one point must be made because it is so characteristic of the man: Dumas' failure to perceive that, as a man as well as a woman must necessarily be a party to any act of sexual irregularity, his thesis requires that the man, as well as the woman, must be punished for it. His agreeable and flattering memories blocked the way: these and that constitutional inability of his to repent in sackcloth and ashes.

That, however, is a stumbling block over which most moralists trip; for none of them—not even our admirable bishops—are ever as hard, in these matters, on men as on women.

Some of them have sometimes been heard to talk of "fallen men" and profess to class them with "fallen women"; but no one who hears them do so ever suspects them of meaning what they say or believes that they would—to put the matter to an acid test—feel as disconcerted at a suggestion that they themselves had been guilty of sexual improprieties in their youth as they would be if they were accused of having then stolen the contents of fellow-students' overcoat pockets in a college cloak-room. Nor do we ever find them—to take another acid test—proposing that "fallen men" should be reclaimed by laundry work in penitentiaries, or maintaining that a king or a prince whose addiction to gallantry is the common talk of the Court and the town is an unfit associate for virtuous men.

We must not, therefore, be too hard on Dumas for an inconsistency which is common to the race of preachers;

nor must we be too hard on him because, while calling himself a Feminist—he claimed to have invented the word—he constantly used language which seemed to imply that every married woman was her husband's chattel. That sort of inconsistency always occurs when men begin to preach before they have finished thinking. Dumas was a reformer, in spite of it, and, on the whole, on the side of the angels.

The problem which he was attempting to solve is insoluble. The moralists who profess to solve it arrive at their alleged solution only by ignoring difficulties; and a solution so reached is no solution at all. One can no more combine imperfect men and women into a perfect social system than one can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. So the problem remains—a very pressing problem in certain hard cases; and the question is: What shall we do about it? Shall we preach pious resignation to those who have failed to secure happiness in marriage or shall we provide them with a practical remedy?

That was where Dumas joined issue with the churchmen. They preached pious resignation. He, with equal fervour, preached divorce.

Not, of course, divorce as an end in itself, but divorce as a means to an end—the end being the attainment of that supreme happiness in marriage which is possible only when the right man marries the right woman: a means, to put it otherwise, of correcting mistakes which are found fatal to happiness and so making the best of things in an imperfect world. And the world is admittedly imperfect. That is a point on which clericals and anticlericals are agreed.

It is also common ground between them that harmony

in marriage is the ideal and that love ought to be, as Dumas says, the "basis of marriage." But does not that proposition carry a corollary? If we postulate that love ought to be of the essence of marriage, and observe that, in fact, it sometimes is not, are we not committed to the conclusion that divorce is the obvious machinery for promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number by multiplying the marriages which will conform to the ideal?

Dumas thought so. As his second wife was a divorced woman, he may be supposed to have had his personal reasons for thinking so; but his motives, whatever they may have been, do not affect the value of his thesis, though they must have inspired him to fight for it more doughtily; and one would picture him quoting, if only he had known English, as he threw his hat into the ring:

> He sees thy face through rolling drums,
> That beat to battle where he stands;
> Thy face across his fancy comes,
> And gives the battle to his hands.

At any rate he did throw his hat into the ring, and followed it there, and fought effectively. His opponent was a priest—Abbé Vidieu—who had just preached and published a sermon which marshalled all the ecclesiastical arguments for insisting upon the indissolubility of all marriages. He tore those arguments to shreds in a work entitled "La Question du Divorce" which carried the war boldly into the enemy's camp.

It is a very brilliant dialectical display, well-documented, as well as well-reasoned, and still worth reading.

It exposes the hypocrisy of the Church which, while denouncing divorce as a sin, has, over and over again, in the case of kings and other important and influential people, pronounced decrees of nullity which were really disguised divorces. It points out, giving facts and figures, that a stern, unbending marriage law neither implies nor can be trusted to establish a high moral standard, but that morals have often been most lax in countries in which matrimonial bonds have been tightest. It insists that more divorce would mean less crime, seeing that, where the law does not allow divorce, husbands murder unfaithful wives and juries acquit them.

And so on and so forth; Dumas demanding liberal facilities for divorce, not as a concession to vice, but as an aid to virtue as well as happiness. He was in favour of divorce because he was in favour of marriage. He was so much in favour of marriage that a critic once accused him of "making a fetich of regularity in sexual relations." His own second marriage, to which the lady's divorce had been the necessary prelude, is said to have been serenely happy. His pamphlet demanding divorce was a political act as well as a display of fireworks. It rallied public opinion to the support of that Loi Nacquet which brought divorce back into the French code; and it is, perhaps, the only one of Dumas' contributions to social philosophy which has any real value.

When he generalised about women he constantly lost his way and contradicted himself. When he searched the Scriptures he derived little from the quest except a new prose style which did not become him. But he did handle this one concrete practical problem in a masterly

manner. Knowing what he wanted, he got what he wanted, not only for himself, but also for his countrymen.

The consequences of his reform, it is said, disappointed him. It did not, as he seems to have hoped that it would, make the relations of the sexes in France as simple and pleasant as they had been in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Complications continued to occur. Jealousies continued to cause trouble. The pleasures of immorality continued to please; and there still were men and women for whom divorce was not enough because the temptations of promiscuity were too great for them to overcome. A perfect world could not, after all, be constructed out of imperfect materials.

It is to the credit of Dumas' intelligence that he discovered that. It is to the credit of his character that the discovery saddened him.

His inconsistencies sometimes make one smile. Perhaps his African blood accounts for them. It seems equally strange that the favourite lover of the most notorious of the courtesans should have evolved, without conversion or repentance, into the most moral person going, and that the most moral person going should have presented a famous actress with a love letter, which he must have known that she would be quite sure to publish, recalling the memory of his early amorous escapades. There certainly is there a curious blend of piety and pride suggesting an African rather than a European origin.

But that does not matter. Dumas the Younger, in spite of his father's bad example, and his early exposure to agreeable temptations, had reached the goal of morality, though he had travelled to it by a strange road.

The reform of the marriage laws which he had helped to secure was a very valuable reform, very helpful to morality, though it could not, as he seems to have expected, guarantee it; and we will treat it as the culmination of his remarkable career, recording only that he died of meningitis on 28 November, 1895, in what we may almost call the odour of sanctity, having triumphed over moral difficulties no less great, in their way, than those material difficulties which his father had surmounted in his fight for fame.

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